THE LITERARY ESSAY IN ENGLISH

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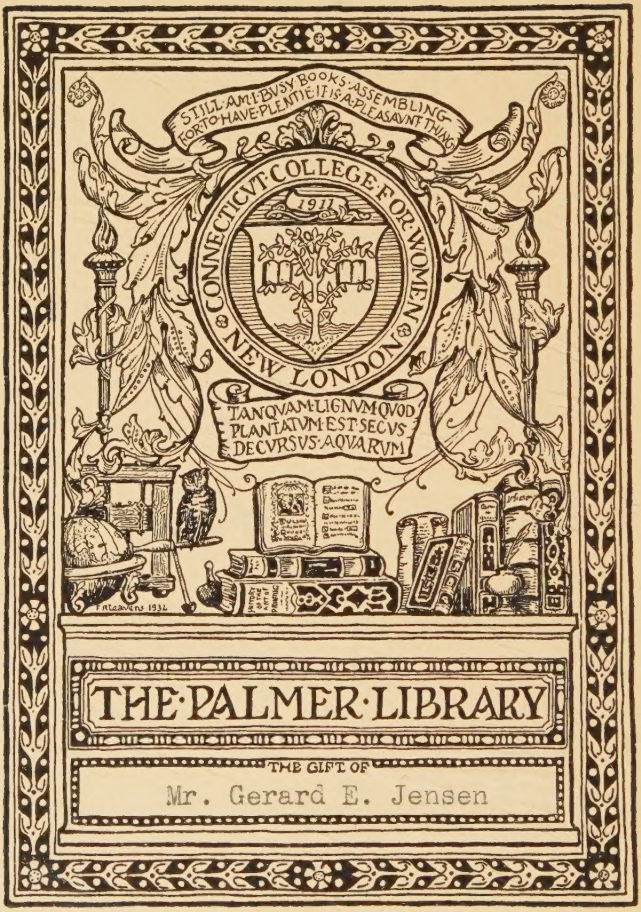

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THE LITERARY ESSAY IN ENGLISH

SISTER M. ELEANORE, C.S.C., PH.D.

A book is a shell on the sands of time,
Borne shoreward from life's unresting sea,
With strange, sweet murmurings in its heart
That whisper of immortality.

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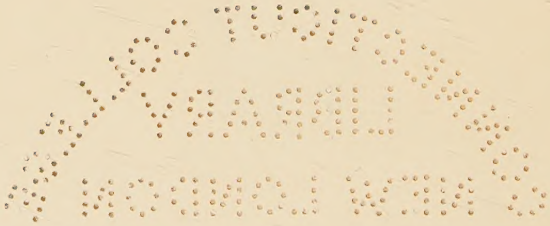

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TO MY DEAR PARENTS

MR. AND MRS. MAURICE F. BROSNAHAN

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PREFACE

Having had in a negative, critical way a slight part in the making of this book, I am here permitted by way of preface a word concerning the purpose of the work, the importance of the purpose, and the way in which the volume may best serve that purpose.

From the reading of these pages even the academic person might not divine that the author's first aim has been to provide a book for schools, and the fact that the book does not betray its purpose is perhaps the best recommendation of it as a text on the literary essay for the college class in English. In being pleasantly and honestly disguised it may be the more surely effective, somewhat in the manner of the sermon in any of the great plays of Shakespeare. In this respect at least it is unique among the books on the subject, and it is easily presumed that students will not be displeased with a schoolbook that is agreeably humane.

It is evident in the several chapters that the author has made a very successful effort to deal with the various kinds of essays in the same spirit in which the essays themselves were done. It is basically assumed throughout that the best study of any literature is the study of the literature itself, that the essays of the masters will be by far their own best recommendation and amplest reward to whoever will make acquaintance with them.

The chapters present a goodly store of reliable information concerning the various essayists and illuminating bits of comment upon their respective productions, but all of this is kept carefully subordinate to the main purpose—of inspiring in the student an efficient desire to explore for himself the rich field of the classic English essay. In the accomplishment of that purpose this treatment of the essay should prove to be for the student a delightful invitation and introduction to a most delightful literary world.

The essay literature has not received in the English program of most colleges either the kind or the amount of attention it deserves, with the result that this species of literature is in comparison to some other species a practically unknown realm. Fiction, poetry, and the drama have received much more justice. Right education will no doubt continue unto the end of time to involve a tangle of problems, and the teaching of English is not the least of them, but there can be no doubt that one of the most proper purposes of the English course in the college is to develop in the student some appreciation of the literary art and, to whatever degree may be possible, the student's own literary ability. How might this development be effected better or more surely than by introducing the student directly to such masters of the literary essay as Bacon, Addison, Steele, Lamb, De Quincey, and Stevenson? It is just this introduction that the present volume means to give. It is anticipated that the mere introduction will be sufficient, that being introduced the student will of his own accord make further acquaintance in this genial company of masters, of

most profitably delightful minds and hearts that have expressed themselves to the world. Such association should surely beget in the student something of the literary sense, a sense which for the manifold purposes of life is as invaluable as it is rare.

The intelligent teacher of English who uses this book for class purposes will naturally want to make use of it in his own personal way. It may, however, be suggested that if the use of the text by students is made a sheer task for them, it will fail entirely of that best effect for which it is intended. There is no gainsaying the fact that well-nigh the total of the teaching in the schools is, of more or less necessity, a persevering persecution of the students through all the youthful years of their minority. Happily there is in the nature of the subject at least no reason whatever why the class in literature should not be a real relief from the academic grind involved in other subjects. If the essay especially be approached in the manner and in the mood so well illustrated in this book, the study should be for both students and teacher a pure delight, all the more profitable in being the exception to the rule, which is otherwise likely to have no exception.

I have no doubt that "The Literary Essay in English" here offered to the schools will justify itself to the satisfaction of any teacher of English who will use it in a rational way.

J. LEONARD CARRICO, C.S.C.

NOTRE DAME UNIVERSITY

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THE LITERARY ESSAY IN ENGLISH

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Le style c'est l'homme.—BUFFON

DEFINITION

The literary essay is as elusive and charmingly indefinable as a spring day in the woods. The throaty note of the homing bird, the brook laughing irresponsibly, the whimsical pathways which the walker seems to be fashioning for himself only to find that they lead him back to the garish world just a moment too soon, the trees keeping their vigil in a stillness that whispers of God—all these combine into an effect which we term "atmosphere." Reading an essay is like taking a stroll in the woods when tired. In the one case nature communing with us lightens the burden of world-weariness that weighs upon us at times; in the other we are refreshed by the sweetness that comes from the heart of one who has preserved or found amid the stress and bitterness of life peace of soul—for the true essayist is graduated from the school of experience. In this school he has learned in fuller measure the truth that makes

men free, with the freedom of spiritual rebirth. And as one who glories in the miracle of spring's rebirth does not want as companion during his stroll the mere botanist seeking his specimens, so the lover of the essay, glorying in the freedom of the essayist's regenerated soul, shuns the fellowship of the mere rhetorician with his categorical definitions.

The modern scholar with his definitely pigeonholed knowledge of literary forms will quarrel with this beginning and will remind us of the rule established by that prince of Latin stylists, that master of the letter essay, Cicero: "Any study, indeed, which is to investigate a subject in a reasonable manner, should be begun by a definition, so that it may be understood what the matter under inquiry is." Yet Cicero himself admits the difficulty of formulating definitions, "in the consideration of which men's minds are frequently attracted to opposing opinions." Cicero was, however, speaking here of unliterary subjects, while our subject, being literature with all the liberties of the literary, gives us a certain liberty in our study of it. The particular difficulty in defining the essay is to avoid both a definition so general as to include all prose writings not strictly to be classed as history or fiction and one so restricted as to embrace only one type of essay, the personal or familiar. The title of this book, *The Literary Essay in English*, would seem at first sight to increase the difficulty of finding an adequate definition of the essay as a form of literature. Some informal exposition of the term "literary" as it is variously employed will, perhaps, be of assistance not only in our

work of definition but also in that of clearing the ground for satisfactory classification of essays. Applied to any form of literature the term "literary" denotes artistic perfection according to kind; applied in a restricted use to the lyric in poetry and to the personal essay in prose, it may be interpreted to mean not only this perfection of kind but also, and absolutely, the author's artistic expression of his personality. Under our title, then, we shall have liberty to treat, along with the personal or strictly literary essay, those essays which, while artistically perfect in their own kind, have not the dominatively lyric or subjective quality. Rules, outlines, classifications, are all well enough in their way; they are academically necessary in connection with all forms of literature; and they attain new and significant consequence in their application to the personal essay, which, like the lyric, has its own rule, a rule with but one requirement. The lyric requires that the poet possess the gift of song; the essay requires that the author have attained perfection of style. The essay is a fairy creature who can assume the rôle of philosopher, scientist, critic, confidential friend, gossip, court fool—of anyone who can write prose and who wishes to express his opinion about something or somebody.

Many delightful things have come from France, and it is from France that we have the essay as a distinct form of literature. In the literary sense in which Montaigne employed it, the word *essais* meant "a trial, attempt, or endeavor." Incompleteness, tentativeness, were felt by the inventor to be characteristic of the new literary genre. This idea persisted when the essay was

transplanted into England, and Doctor Johnson gave it a rather contemptuous definition in his dictionary: "a loose sally of the mind, an irregular, undigested piece, not a regular and orderly performance." But this "undigested piece" engaged literary genius vital enough to make the essay a part of the very life of literature; this little morganatic love with whom the princes of literary royalty dallied away delightful hours in half-shamed secrecy came to number among her offspring children of most royal rank. Boasting now perfection of form and finish, in its latest and most ideal development, the literary essay creates an atmosphere of strength and companionship, of virtue and loveliness. Artistic conception, unity, integrity, self-completion, and, above all, expression of the author's personality are its essential characteristics.

Some Technical Elements

To appreciate the essay adequately we must understand something of the difference between prose and poetry, and must determine what constitutes the real beauty of prose writing. Though prose cannot make use of those external aids to beauty, the meter and rime of poetry, it has in common with its sister art rhythm and harmony of phrasing. The artist, whether in prose or poetry, has but the material common to both out of which to fashion the child of his brain—thought for the soul and words for the body. Poetry is more imaginative than prose and is usually on a higher plane of thought, but with the admission of this difference—unless

perhaps we accept the view of those who hold that poetry appeals primarily to the emotions and prose to the understanding—our comparison or contrast between the matter of prose and that of poetry must necessarily end. But the externals, the technique of these two arts, give opportunity for endless comparative study. Formal poetry is made by the welding together of two rhythms, the basic meter and the phrasal overtone, and in this harmonic effect is its beauty, a beauty made more effective by a quality of return in the musical and rounded links of rime. Prose, too, has its pattern and its symphonic rhythm, though its movement is much more direct, more forthright, than that of poetry. The poet may choose any one of a dozen metrical schemes and weave upon it an exquisite web of lovely dreams, but the prose writer must fashion his own pattern as directed by his subject matter and the working of his mind upon it. Without restricting the thought-process in any way, never molding his ideas to fit some desired form of expression, the prose writer must create prose which is rhythmical without being metrical; he must combine long and short syllables, accented and unaccented syllables, in an ever-recurring yet ever-varied leading movement as elusive and intangible and at the same time as surely evident as the leitmotiv in the music dramas of Wagner. If he can do this, we can but call him an artist.

True literary art is, as is every art, the result not only of the love of the beautiful, which inspires us to seek after the adequate expression of it in something external to ourselves, but also the result of perfect mas-

tery of the technique which is the foundation of artistic expression. Hence all of us who love the beautiful and who have the patience to labor may become in some measure artists in prose. One of the grounds upon which this little book pleaded at the outset the right to existence was the hope that by a study of the development of the literary essay some few at least might be inspired or encouraged to find self-expression through this charming medium. In our study we shall have much to say of style in writing, and we shall, with some qualifications, define style in Buffon's justly celebrated phrase, as the writer himself. We shall endeavor to trace out the development of the literary essay from its "irregular, undigested" state in the early days when the English language, being rehabilitated after its long relegation under the Norman conquest as the vernacular of the unlettered poor, was so crude that even inspired genius and genuine love could not write a literary essay in English, to its present eminence, when it may use language which is in itself songful. We shall, moreever, attempt to give an idea of the personality of the essayists whom we are to consider.

Because of our acceptance, even with qualifications, of Buffon's definition of style we shall, perhaps, be accused of inconsistency in urging that those who wish to form their own style should study such writers as Newman and Stevenson. By study we do not mean imitation, for while it is very easy for the young writer to cease to be himself in his writing, it is not so easy for him to become a Newman or a Stevenson. There is a sufficient amount of parrot in all of us to make the imi-

tation of mere external expression comparatively easy; but to find out the literary soul of a writer—if this is what we mean when we speak of his style's being himself—is just as difficult as to see his soul when we look at his body. The invisible manner of writing is no less intimately and inseparably united to its matter than is the invisible soul to the body of the living man. Applying to this fact, however, a bit of Chestertonian reasoning, we shall maintain that the invisible soul of man is perhaps more visible than his body, because the most modestly dressed person, in conversation or in writing, almost invariably strips his soul of all disguises and lets the world see it as it is. Style is no more the manifestation of the man himself in writing than it is in anything else which he does, except, perhaps, that the introspection which accompanies writing makes his self-revelation more distinct and adequate in the product of writing than in the products of his other acts. Here we must make another admission, however, which is that in writing a person does not use, as in his physical acts, already existing material, but creates out of the most immaterial of all things, thought, both the soul and the body, the manner and the matter of his writing. Then if we question the definition "Style is the man himself" and quarrel with the conception of style as a something too elusive and intangible to be grasped, we must admit at least that style is born or made of the man himself and, in consequence, possesses his own so-called indefinable charm of personality. This admission, however, is by no means unquestionable. We must concede that even our best-loved friend, whose every mood has

an open door to us, is possessed of a complex personality—and shall we grumble because his self-expression is consequently complex? The greater part of what constitutes personality is common to all men, and yet there is a something else which makes it individual, just as all men's faces have features in common, and yet every face is individual. So, too, have literary styles many things in common and yet in every instance a something peculiar which depends upon taste, diction, habit of thought, knowledge, character, and the other things involved in personality. All men have bodies and souls, and yet no two men are the same; all writing has body and soul, and yet no two compositions are the same. Shall we rebel against the difficulty, or shall we simply admit it and rejoice at the charm of variety?

No matter how inspired a writer may be and no matter how charming his personality, his style must ever be built upon the substructure of grammar and rhetoric, just as the writer's character is built upon the substructure of moral law and principle—and these we can study and understand. As strength of character and mastery of the art of holy and comely living are the results of untiring care in moral training and discipline, so are power of thought and mastery of the art of literary expression the results of infinite care in mental discipline and literary training. The limpid and melodious writing of Stevenson was the result not only of inspired genius but also of his infinite capacity for taking pains and of his "playing the sedulous ape" zealously though prudently, for he understood perfectly that to imitate slavishly and to understand the methods

by which results are secured are two very different things. The true artist may conceal his grammar and rhetoric, but he never ignores them. They are the foundation of his style, and he realizes that self-expression is no less self-expression because it is trained and reasoned. There is little danger of overemphasizing the necessity for perfect mastery of the science and art of grammar and rhetoric by those who wish to write well, granting even that their inspiration be the highest.

One of the bugaboos which first confront the young writer is the question of diction. In fact, teachers long suffering from mountains of compositions to be revised usually make haste to summon this ogre into the classroom, and insist upon first-hand acquaintance with the dictionary on the part of the student. There is much to be said for the formal method of gathering words, and yet it should not be an end in itself. Only the artificial stylist cultivates words as the florist cultivates flowers. The thing that matters is the personal element. Better a hundred words which the student handles as easily as he wields a tennis-racket than a thousand which he fumbles in agony as if they were hot marbles. Good reading—with a friendly dictionary invitingly near—is one of the best ways to nourish a feeble young vocabulary, and it is the only food which does not cause growing-pains. As the epicure inquires with relish into the ingredients of a new and delectable dish, so does the interested reader learn to consider the meaning and relations of new words as veritable titbits for pleasant mental rumination. Having acquired a vocabulary of

reasonable size and being personally interested in something worth saying, the writer's choice of words will in a large measure take care of itself. "Some words," says Ben Jonson, "are to be culled out for ornament and colour, as we gather flowers to strow houses, or make garlands; but they are better when they grow to our style, as in a meadow, where though the mere grass and greenness delight, yet the variety of flowers doth heighten and beautify." On the other hand, the artificial stylist distorts his ideas to fit his expression, and his main concern is not so much to find words to express his meaning as it is to find meaning for his words. He puts a barrier of words between his own mind and that of his reader, when, in truth, words should be as the lens through which the reader sees into the mind of the writer. The first business of language is simply to be transparent.

Style, being personal, partakes of all the influences that have gone into the making of the author's self. It follows, then, that one of the first duties of a writer is to write idiomatically; that is, to master the phrases or modes of expression which are peculiar to his own language and around which have grown up associations and memories that make them pregnant with meaning. The English language should be written as an Englishman or an American would write, not in the manner of a German or a Frenchman. This brings us to a consideration of the sentence, which reveals in its construction the author's habit of mind. When we speak of the ponderous, antithetical Latinity of Johnson, of the classic, graceful profundity of Newman, of the brusque force-

fulness of Carlyle, of the sweet-hearted playfulness of Lamb, of the sparkling vivaciousness of Stevenson, and of the mystic harmoniousness of Thompson, we are really speaking simply of the habits of mind in these authors. We learn the workings of a writer's mind by study of his sentence structure, and so, too, may the young writer learn his own habit of mind. If he finds that his sentences are shallow, he should study Newman to help him to depth of thought; if they are phlegmatic and stiff, he should study Lamb and Stevenson to discover the ways to grace and ease; if they are flat and commonplace, he should study Thompson for mysticism of thought and harmony of phrasing; if they are short and "choppy," he should study Johnson and Addison to acquire length and coherence. There should be pleasing variety in the length of sentences, but, being mindful of the fact that when we think aright we think in sentences of various lengths, there is never any real need for artificial variety. Deep and logical thinking usually requires the long, periodic sentence; emotion, if at all impassioned, seeks the short sentence; description makes more frequent use of the long sentence; and narration, if rapid, has need of the short sentence. But there are no hard and fast rules regarding the length of sentences; because if one has a well-trained mind, sentence length and structure will be as they should when his thoughts are put on paper. The trouble with most persons is that they think the rules of composition apply only to the written word, when, in reality, these rules should have an intimate part in the thinking-process, even in ordinary conversation.

The third essential to good writing is paragraphing, which is usually the despair of pupil and teacher alike. There are two extremes to be avoided, the making of every sentence into a paragraph, and the failure to paragraph at all. We must bear in mind that the paragraph differs only in degree and not in kind from the sentence. When in our consideration of a subject or part of a subject our mind develops more thoughts than can be adequately expressed in a single sentence, the paragraph is the logical result. Thoughts are of two kinds: the isolated, complete thought, such as, "The pine tree loves mankind so much that it treasures in its arms the glory of summer to gladden the world when all about it speaks of death"; and the sentence which calls for elaboration, such as, "Every detail of the scene is impressed upon my memory." The second sentence awakens questions as to what scene, what details, pleasant or unpleasant. The answering of these questions produces the paragraph, which, because it develops naturally from the topic sentence, will be a unit. That the paragraph be a unit is of infinitely more importance than that it be of a certain length. Once this essential of unity is safeguarded, the author's care should be for the appearance of the written page and the ensuing interest of the reader, which by some psychological process is refreshed and increased at the beginning of every new paragraph, and which is wearied by the continuous strain of unbroken sentences. For assistance in learning how to paragraph the young writer should have recourse to the more modern authors, because custom has changed in regard to paragraphing,

and there must ever be care for good usage. Rules cannot be formulated for anything so individual and so dependent upon its own varied and immediate needs as the paragraph, and hence the best thing to do is to observe the thought-process itself—for we all think in paragraphs, whether we realize it or not—and let common sense be our guide in the business of paragraphing.

Classification

To determine to what department of prose writing the essay belongs is difficult. The standard classification of prose into narration, description, exposition, and argumentation is not of so much value here, for there are essays of all four types and essays that combine two or more. The family of the essay is not only numerous in itself, but it seems to be a sort of orphanage into which all otherwise unclassifiable compositions are thrust for want of a better place in which to put them. At any rate, in despair of all else, brevity is commonly considered an earmark of the essay. Since we have devoted ourselves to a study of the literary essay as a subjective creation, we must perforce accept this characteristic of brevity as the all-important one in our classification, because a subjective or lyrical production must of its very nature be short. By including under our term "literary essay" any prose composition which is not strictly classed as history or fiction and which, though lacking the subjective element, has artistic perfection in its own kind, we have left ourselves free to consider certain long compositions embraced in the wide use of the term.

Essays may, then, be advantageously divided into two general classes: the objective, or those in which the subject matter is primary and the personality of the author so secondary as to be unobtrusive, or even negligible; and the subjective, in which the subject matter, however important in itself, finds its truest worth in being a means to the end, the revelation of the author's self. Of course the distinction is not to be taken too strictly. A purely objective essay or projection in the magic-lantern sense is rare outside the world of science; yet the tendency among the early English essayists was away from the subjective, just as poetry in the epic stage is less subjective than poetry in the later and lyric stage. Most objective essays are scientific and didactic. The purely scientific treatise, which concerns itself solely with the exposition of scientific theory, is not literary and has no place in our study, though we must include the essay of the naturalists. Didactic essays are of two kinds: the aphoristic essay, which aims formally and frankly at teaching; and the character essay, which conceals its lesson within a friendly and informal discourse. The sermonic tinge, that ex-cathedra purple of Baconian tradition, lingered for many years in the pages of the classic or formal essayists, and even many of the biographical and critical writers were not averse to the magisterial manner. But with the passing of monarchy, which wrapped its robe of wonder about the precious few whose souls could not bear the gaze of the common crowd, the glory of self-revelation came into its own, and the subjective or strictly literary essay was born. The letter essay, the short-story essay, and finally—

that very darling of them all—the familiar essay came to refresh and gladden the whole reading world. Then kindly old Montaigne could spare his blushes because he had laid bare his soul—such unveiling of the inner self later became quite the fashion. Through the medium of the subjective essay we have chatted in kindly everyday acquaintance with gruff, learned, and big-hearted Johnson, with clever, democratic Goldsmith, with aristocratic Burke, with visionary, altruistic Shelley, with playful, lovable, long-suffering Lamb, with correct, but genial Stevenson; we have had friendly curtain lectures from Bacon, Addison, De Quincey, and Hazlitt. Because the literary essay demands for its background a society that is self-conscious, introspective, and well read, it necessarily came comparatively late among literary forms, and yet its vast stores of wealth have been augmented by practically every noteworthy writer since the time of Bacon.

Origin and Early History

Though the essay as a distinct literary form dates only from Montaigne, it has a most worthy ancestry, traceable back to classical antiquity. Though Socrates left no books, we may read his speeches in the *Memorabilia* of Xenophon. Speeches in essay form are to be found among the writings of the Sophists, and the characters of Thucydides spoke nothing less than essays. The Bible, especially in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Wisdom, has essays on poverty, riches, and friendship which forecast the modern species. The germ of the written

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essay first appeared in the interpolated reflections of Greek and Latin historians, and soon the oration was superseded by a literary production which reached perfection in the letter essays of Cicero. The *Orations* of Demosthenes, the *Dissertations* of Epictetus, the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, the letters and treatises of Dante, Theophrastus's *Characters*, Caxton's *Prefaces*, Chaucer's "Tale of Melibeus," Gosson's *School of Abuse*, Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*, the *Marprelate Tracts* of Thomas Nash, are all excellent essays antedating Montaigne. Yet the Frenchman is the father of the modern prose essay because when in 1580 he published the first volume of his *Essais* he gave to the world a well-defined literary organ of personality, a new literary genre—the essay.

Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592)

Montaigne was born at the Château de Montaigne, near Bergerac, upon the Dordogne, the third son of the noble Pierre Eyquem, a father who took very seriously his parental duties. It could have been but the extreme of solicitude which required that his children be aroused in the morning by soft music and that their German tutor speak only Latin to them. After six years in this soft-voiced, soft-footed household, young Michel was sent to the Collège de Guienne at Bordeaux, where he remained till he was thirteen years of age. Though he then followed a course of studies with the view to becoming a lawyer, he never cared for the science of law and gladly retired to the country when his elder brother

died. In 1569 Michel with his wife, formerly Françoise de la Chassaigne, went to live in the Château de Montaigne. Enjoying a sufficient income and domestic felicity, Montaigne lived "in quiet and reading," remote from the political quarrels distracting France. His literary work was interrupted only by a few years of travel and by two terms of office as mayor of Bordeaux. The work of these quiet years at his peaceful, happy home consists of a translation of Raymond de Sebonde's *Natural Theology*, supervision of the publication of the works of Monsieur de la Boétie, and his famous *Essais*.

The *Essais* can be considered as a true delineation of their author, who desired to write of himself "in mine owne genuine, simple, and ordinarie fashion, without contention, art, or study; for it is myselfe I pourtray. . . . Thus, gentle reader, myselfe am the groundeworke of my booke." Montaigne did not write from any external necessity but only from sheer inner compulsion. "My mind . . . begets in me so many chimeras and fantastical monsters, so orderless, and without any reason, one huddling upon another, that at leisure to view the foolishness and monstrous strangeness of them, I have begun to keep a register of them, hoping, if I live, one day to make him ashamed and blush at himselfe." If Montaigne did not live to blush for himself, his readers, at least, have blushed for him. He is at times frankly lascivious, though never failing to write in a familiar, attractive style which fascinates even while the subject matter repels. This occasional libertine, as he calls himself, is not, however, the real Montaigne,

the lovable old man who knows all the good literature of the ages, who is so profoundly philosophical, who touches the height of religious convictions. "We converse with Montaigne," observes Hallam, "or rather hear him talk; it is almost impossible to read his Essays without thinking that he speaks to us; we see his cheerful brow, his sparkling eye, his negligent, but gentlemanly demeanor; we picture him in his armchair with his few books around the room, and Plutarch on the table." This is the amiable gentleman whose person and property were respected by the five monarchs who successively ruled within the long life of the author a country in turmoil.

Montaigne made and illustrated the essay somewhat as Poe, centuries later, defined and perfected the modern short story. Turning from the impersonal, dissertational style of writing then the standard, and giving to the essay personality and easy, natural, desultory style, he made of it *the* subjective form of prose literature. Molding the expression to the idea, never the idea to the expression, he made words in very truth the garment of thought. There lingers about his essays an antique charm, an old-world sweetness, a picturesque beauty. Montaigne's very inconsistencies,—for he combined the principles of the Stoic with the practices of the Epicurean,—his frivolity, his scandalously intimate glances into the weaknesses of our poor human nature, his negligence, his occasional obscurity, all are forgotten when we put down the book, because of the warm glow he has kindled in our imagination, because of the feeling that we have come to know and love a sincere friend.

Truly a pioneer in the world of thought, he taught an autocracy-ridden humanity its sacred right to at least think its own thoughts. Hazlitt put the matter into a nutshell, thus: "The great merit of Montaigne then was, that he may be said to have been the first who had the courage to say as an author what he felt as a man. And as courage is generally the effect of conscious strength, he was, probably, led to do so by the richness, truth, and force of his own observations on books and men. He was, in the truest sense, a man of original mind, that is, he had the power of looking at things for himself, or as they really were, instead of blindly trusting to, or fondly repeating, what others told him that they were. . . . In this respect we know not which to be most charmed with, the author or the man." The wonder of Montaigne's boundless knowledge grows upon us in the light of the fact that he limited his writings to his honest motto, "Que sais-je?"

To obtain anything like an adequate appreciation of Montaigne one must read him in the original. Yet we must pay a word of tribute to John Florio, who, despite quaint spelling and stilted diction, has preserved in his translation of the essays a spirit and a style which savor strongly of the Frenchman.

The Essay since Montaigne

The publication of the Baconian Book of Proverbs, in 1597, was the birth of the modern essay, though it seems to have taken this literary type backward many stages in its development. Bacon's writings are aphoristic and lack the easy, conversational, and literary

style of Montaigne. We must remember that Bacon was a true child of Tudor nobility, with the formality of the royalist, that he was a "pet" of the "faerie queen." In the seventeenth century several collections of essays mostly didactic in nature were published. The character essay was especially popular, but late in the century it was superseded by the formal epistle, or letter essay. In the reign of Charles II John Dryden developed a new type, devoted to literary criticism. During this century there came into being also the classic essay, whose greatest masters bring it down the years even to our own day. Then the short-story essay was born to carry literature over into the next century. What a fine little pack mule is the story, even when it is a spineless creature lacking plot and character! How often it travels through the desert when all other literary forms have fallen by the way! In the eighteenth century the essay by joining forces with journalism took almost entire possession of the literary field and numbered among its leaders such men as Defoe, Addison, Steele, and, finally, the great old dictator himself. What condescension in the mighty! For Johnson's "On the Advantages of Living in a Garret" is no less surprising than would be the kittenlike friskiness of a hoary and dignified elephant. Throughout these years —we must remember that democracy was a-borning— the essay was growing more personal, and all it needed was a writer like the bohemian Goldsmith to give it a decided turn toward the familiar type. The two kinds of journal popular in the early part of the nineteenth century, the magazine and the critical review, helped

to further the distinction between the familiar essay on the one hand and the critical and biographical on the other. Finally, Lamb brought the essay to the heights, and Stevenson helped to secure it immortal foothold thereon.

Americans were too busy conquering their continent to write essays before the late eighteenth century, at which period, however, they began to make up for lost time. Induced by characteristic impulse "to try anything once," they succeeded, within some fifty years, in developing all the types of essay. Irving, in the judgment of Europeans our most noteworthy man of letters, adhered to the journalistic type then so popular in England. Emerson, though linked up with the aphorists in his lack of continuity of thought, his desire to give expression to single truths whether closely related or not, is biographical and critical in his subject matter. It would be tedious here to run down the line—Thoreau, Lowell, Holmes, Howells, Repplier, and Huneker are some of them—till we come to the most modern of the moderns, those rapid-fire essayists, who leave us fairly breathless and who make the current magazines a veritable mental feast. Truly the essay has today come into its own, and its triumph is most evident in the fact that even the young are coming to believe that a book with neither conversation nor pictures may yet be so fascinating as to compel immediate and entire perusal.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Practically all the writers that are to be considered in this book have written something on the subject of style. The author has culled out occasional sentences from them which she considers especially helpful. Some of the books on the art of writing that deserve investigation are *The Art of Writing English*, by Meiklejohn; *English Composition*, by Barrett Wendell; *Word and Phrase*, by Fitzgerald; *Specimens of Prose Composition*, by Nutter, Hersey, and Greenough; *English Composition in Theory and Practice*, by Canby and others; *The Writer's Art*, by Rollo W. Brown.

CHAPTER II

THE APHORISTIC ESSAY

Learning we find in books, but wisdom in ourselves.—SPALDING

BACKGROUND

The constellations in the literary firmament were most propitiously arranged when the essay was born into the fine old family of English literature. Let us not imagine, however, that the charming literary essay, so familiar to us moderns, whose ears have been spoiled by the musical cadences of a Stevenson, whose sense of humor can take its delight in the sweet-hearted, ever-graceful playfulness of a Lamb, and whose minds have come to demand that profound truth in literature shall be delivered to us in the soul-stirring splendor of a Newman,—let us not imagine that this lovely creature sprang full-panoplied from the Jovelike brow of that wisest of Englishmen, its immediate progenitor, Lord Francis Bacon. Bacon was a man of so many and so great affairs that the birth of this happy child of his brain, notwithstanding its importance to us, seems to have been but the merest incident to him. Above all, let us, who live in these days when English literary art is, as Thompson predicts, in danger of "dwindling to the extinction of unendurable excellence," beware lest

we be tempted to put on the monocle of superiority to stare in literary horror at the general loose-jointedness and the graceless apparel of Bacon's essay-child, for we may soon find ourselves as disconcerted in the presence of this true daughter of her father as if we should discover ourselves condescending to an encyclopedia! Perhaps it will be just as well to let her speak for herself, however, and to consider, in preparation for our acquaintance with her, the times in which she was born.

Bacon lived in the Elizabethan period when, because of the "flowery crop of knowledge and new light sprung up and yet springing daily," England, according to Milton, should have been seen "rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks." It is not surprising that Milton, a Puritan of the Puritans, considered the Middle Ages as an intellectual sleep and the Protestant Reformation as an awakening; nor is it questionable that Milton himself was, as he shows in this same *Areopagitica*, very much awake to the trend of the times. There is no doubt of the economic awakening which occurred during the reign of Elizabeth. The rapid growth of manufacturing was giving employment to thousands of persons who were idle and discontented because of the conditions resulting from the breaking up of the medieval system of industry; exploration had increased trade, and increased trade was directing men's minds to further exploration, which was in its turn made possible by political peace at home and abroad,—changes which created a leisured class with an outlook broadened by contact with other nations. Even in religious matters there was an ap-

proach toward peace. Elizabeth was a wise woman, albeit a vain, frivolous, and unscrupulous one; and though as liberal in head-chopping as the rest of her illustrious family, she managed to conciliate to some extent both Catholics and Protestants and to give to both offices of state. After the defeat of the Spanish Armada Protestantism was firmly established in England, and persecution of Catholics began to assume the modern methods of spiritual and moral rather than of physical violence; and though religious unrest continued because so much of England was still Catholic, there was comparative peace. In addition to the economic and religious prosperity, the art of printing was scattering among the masses the literary wealth of the ages. As a result of all these changes England was well ready for the essayist, with his leisurely habit of mind, his knowledge of men and of books; ready for his writing, not through stress of passionate impulse, but through sheer enjoyment of putting down on paper the well-digested learning, the allusions, and the references which are the fruitage of years of literary garnering.

Though we call Bacon the father of the essay in English, we must not forget its more remote ancestry, an ancestry sheltered from prying eyes in that same obscurity which veils the authorship of practically all old English literature. Because of this obscurity we shall have to content ourselves with generalization. In the Middle Ages the art of bookmaking was too costly to let the written essay supplant oral instruction to any great extent, and as a result culture was confined almost exclusively to the monasteries and universities. "The

same hand," writes Dawson, "which dispensed the bread of eternal life held in jealous custody the pearl of earthly wisdom; within the same walls the priest practiced the mysteries of his religion and inculcated the rudiments of literature; and to these centers of 'light and leading,' the whole studious youth of Europe flocked." The poor scholar, of necessity begging his way from city to city that he might save himself from being treated as a criminal, like the ordinary beggar, had to carry with him a letter given by the chancellor of a university. In those days, when severe feudal laws had little patience indeed with freedom of occupation or of movement, no provision for education was made. Thus, learning was to be attained only in schools, where the teacher, not the textbook, was the authority, and where the young were taught by spoken essays still sermonic in character. So trained, the scholar produced the learned, or classic, essay, the parish priest made his sermon into the attractive short-story essay, and the traveling friar indulged the satiric essay. Then came the printing press to change the songs of bards into written narrative in prose or in verse, to make possible the publication of plays, and to turn the oral essay into the written essay. Time was indeed full ripe for the publication of Bacon's little book of essays. It remains to be recalled that in 1308 Wycliffe translated the Bible into English, and that in 1670 the King James version gave us the most beautiful English in the world, unfaithful though it be as translation. As the most sublime poetry ever written is the Hebrew poetry of the Bible, the translators had to dignify and beautify the English

language to make it a fit vehicle for translation. The importance of this translation to the aphoristic essay, which is modeled on the Book of Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs, is obvious.

Definition

The wisest man of all times tells us in his proverbs that words of wisdom spoken in due time are "like apples of gold on beds of silver," and that the minds of those who gather these apples shall be storehouses "filled with all precious and most beautiful wealth!" The wisest of all Englishmen has prepared for us in his essays these apples of gold, and it is our privilege to gather them at leisure into our mental storehouses. Aphoristic apples of gold are wise observations characterized by terse, extremely compact expression; and their bed of silver is their common and magnificent subject matter, which gives them the charm of unity in disunity. Containing but little of the subjective or personal element, the aphoristic essay seems somewhat akin to the meditations of Marcus Aurelius. Bacon gives us the tone of this form in the Dedicatory Epistle to the 1612 edition of his collection: "To write just treatises, requireth leisure in the writer, and leisure in the reader, and therefore are not so fit, neither in regard of your highness's princely affairs, nor in regard of my continual service; which is the cause that hath made me choose to write certain brief notes, set down rather significantly than curiously, which I have called Essays. The word is late, but the thing is ancient; for Seneca's Epistles to Lucilius, if you mark them well, are but

essays, that is, dispersed meditations, though conveyed in the form of epistles." Evidently Bacon kept to the French idea of the essay, a tentative and incomplete production which was to be but the receptacle, the bed of silver, whereon to lay his apples of gold—his detached thoughts, or "dispersed meditations." Yet it is the essay that has made us know the man, for, as he said, it comes "most home to men's business and bosoms." The essays of Bacon are particularly noteworthy because, in addition to having been translated into numerous languages, they have furnished more quotations than any other prose writing in the English language. If when we come to read them we find ourselves inclined to grumble a bit because the paragraphs lack the composition and harmonious progression of thought which we have been taught to consider essential to good writing, let us remember that we are away back in the sixteenth century, when English prose, in its formative stage and still wearing the shackles of several dialects, can in its most literary aspects be but an uncouth and ungainly thing. We must remember that our study of the literary essay in English means necessarily a study of its development, and we must expect to meet with varying standards of literary taste and varying degrees of literary excellence in the several types of essay.

Francis Bacon, Baron Verulam (1561–1626)

Bacon was born into prominence in London as the son of the lord-keeper of the privy seal. After passing his early years in the court, where he won the attention of

the redoubtable queen, he went, at twelve years of age, to Cambridge, but at fourteen left the school in deep disgust with the whole plan of education. To us moderns, who still study Aristotle's logic, the youngster's wrath against the worthy Greek gentleman whose teaching "produced no fruit, but only a jungle of dry and useless branches" is laughably futile. After his return from travel in France, Bacon applied to his uncle, Lord Burleigh, for some lucrative position at the court, but this stern relative, hoping to make his nephew more practical, meted out to the youth opposition rather than aid. The ruse of the uncle succeeded beyond expectation and soon Bacon was a lawyer so admired as to elicit from Ben Jonson the comment that "the fear of every man that heard him speak was, lest he should make an end." He presently attained to greater fame by the publication of his *Essays*. Later, after becoming one of the queen's Learned Counsel, he won just opprobrium by conducting the prosecution of his friend and benefactor, the Earl of Essex, for certain offenses which in their very commission had been known to be of assistance to Bacon's own ends. Under James I Lord Bacon was honored successively with the titles of Lord Chancellor, of Baron Verulam, and, finally, of Viscount St. Albans, which was his proudest boast. Two years later the great *Novum Organum* was published, to place him among literary immortals, but, sadly enough, also to herald his downfall. The rising and hostile democratic spirit in England chose this spoiled son of royalty as its first target. Bacon was convicted of bribery before adverse judges, and though his heavy sentence was soon

remitted his political career was ended. The essay "Of Great Place" is the bitter philosophical fruit of this period of his life. His remaining years he devoted to literary and scientific work.

Bacon is the first and in mental power the greatest of English essayists, who "took all knowledge for his province," whose mind was a veritable encyclopedia, and who could talk on any subject. Though careless of material wealth he was thrifty and tireless of thought. Macaulay tells us that the best collection of jests in the world—being Bacon's they are deeper than jests—was dictated by him when he was too ill for serious work. There are many phases of Bacon's greatness, but we are concerned with him only as an essayist. Of his *Essays* he said, "I am not ignorant that those kind of writings would with less pains and embracement (perhaps) yield more lustre and reputation to my name than those other which I have in hand," and so pleased with them was he that he increased their number from the original ten essays of 1597 to the fifty-eight of 1625. Their popularity is shown not only by the fact that they were soon translated into Latin, French, and Italian, but also by their enduring fame. Strangely enough it was the Latin version which Bacon, the first great master of English prose, predicted "would last as long as books last."

There seem to be two styles in the essays of Bacon, in consequence probably of a change in the author's conception of the function and possibilities of this form of literature. The earlier essays, in which the sentences are all short and packed with thought, show a dearth of

connectives, every sentence being more or less detached from the others. In the later ones there is room for connecting clauses, for figurative language, and for a notable addition of warmth and color. How fine is the casting of the thought in "Virtue is like precious odours, most fragrant when they are incensed or crushed; for prosperity doth best discover vice, but adversity doth best discover virtue," and in "Suspicions amongst thoughts are like bats amongst birds,—they ever fly by twilight." This figurative expression is in great contrast to the regular sentences of the earlier essays, which are somewhat like the analyses of paragraphs printed in the margins of books. Never forgetting that he was a philosopher, always stately and profound, Bacon nevertheless achieved in his later essays what might be called the confidential chats of a philosopher without his robes. Though overwhelmingly magnificent in his very condescension, though always mindful more of his subject than of grace in dressing it for the reader's delectation, Bacon is still the "Ulysses" among English essayists, the writer whose mighty pen must lie at rest for the reason that no other hand is able to wield it. Despite his ponderousness of subject matter Bacon furnished a model of clear and simple style, because by the very plan of his work his sentences had to be short, and with this brevity came the two qualities English prose had lacked, lucidity and pithiness.

It would seem a brave person who would single out portions of Bacon's essays as more suitable for quotation than other portions, and yet it would be sheer cruelty to our gentle reader not to spare him a few of

the intellectual crumbs from our present feast. Since we are here interested in the work of this wise man merely from the literary point of view, we may forget, if possible, Bacon the philosopher and statesman and think of him only as master of the literary. In the essay "Of Studies" we find the famous comment on reading: "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested; that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but cursorily; and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention. . . . Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man." Concerning the art of conversing he informs us in "Of Discourse": "He that questioneth much shall learn much, and content much; but especially if he apply his questions to the skill of the persons whom he asketh; for he shall give them occasion to please themselves in speaking, and himself shall continually gather knowledge. . . . Speech of a man's self ought to be seldom, and well chosen. . . . Speech of touch towards others should be sparingly used. . . . Discretion of speech is more than eloquence." In the essay "Of Truth" the principle seems to be, let the truth be told if it be not too costly; in that "Of Suitors" there appears to be an indifferent attitude toward right and wrong—moderation should be the watchword of the wrongdoer! "Of Friendship," one of the most famous of the essays, seems to value this choicest of human relations only because of its fruits, to proclaim that it is what a man receives from his friends that matters, not what he gives to them. The author does not know that a person becomes better

by a deed of unselfishness; he does not understand at all "the blessedness of giving"; and yet he says, "a friend is another himself" and must be loved as one loves himself. The essays "Of Parents and Children," "Of Marriage and Single Life," and "Of Love" all give us intimate insight into the ideals and principles of the author. He shows us in the essay "Of Atheism" his intellectual coldness and his prudential religion, and in the one entitled "Of Unity of Religion" he makes it clear that it is the political binding power of religion which in his eyes gives it importance. It is not surprising that this worldly-minded philosopher with his finger ever on the political pulse of England should embody in his writing the current English idea of the relation between Church and State. Of death, in the essay under that title, he says, "The contemplation of death as the wages of sin and passage to another world, is holy and religious." As to whether or not Bacon exercised this contemplation we are not informed by his writings. There is consistently maintained in his works an apparent indifference toward religion which from the point of view of philosophy one finds difficult to reconcile with his giant intellect. But from the point of view of faith —that lovely flower of the soul which is rooted in the fertile soil of humility and is watered by the life-giving dew of grace—one does not wonder that Bacon, whose eyes were not lifted above the things of earth, seems to have had little thought for the things of Heaven.

Ben Jonson (1573–1637)

When a man's death has been mourned as a national calamity; when he has been buried in Westminster Abbey, that greatest of mausoleums, with an epitaph "O rare Ben Jonson" by the most eminent of poets; when that modern popular idol Swinburne has compared him to Bacon, much to the disparagement of the philosopher; when he is remembered, among other reasons, because his plays won for him the title of poet laureate, —what is left us to say of him? Just this, that he is a great essayist who has received practically no appreciation. He is great not because of the originality of subject matter, much of which he owed to other writers, but because in those early days when English prose was still rough and obscurely written he wrote in a style that is almost modern, a style clean, well-poised, idiomatic, and inspired by a direct vigor which wastes nothing. Jonson has not been appreciated because he, like all the aphorists, by failing to give the explanation and elaboration which we have been taught by later writers to expect, asks his reader to supplement his reasoning, and because he lived in the days when the drama was so much in favor as to make all other forms of literature insignificant. Francis Thompson puts the fact with his usual aptness: "We know two Ben Jonsons, it may be said—the Ben of the plays, rugged, strong, pedantic, unsympathetic, often heavy, coarse, and repellent even in his humour, where he is strongest; and the Ben of those surprisingly contrasting lyrics, all too few; small, delicate, and exquisite.

It is as though Vulcan took to working in filigree. Here, in *Sylva,* is another Ben, who increases our estimation of the man."

Jonson was born of a prominent family in Westminster. The father, imprisoned by Queen Mary, had upon his release become a minister. He died before his son was born, and the mother later married a bricklayer of London. After spending some years in Westminster School and Cambridge, the young Jonson, on being set to learn the bricklayer's trade, ran away to fight Spaniards in the Netherlands. After fighting a duel he returned to England and, in addition to other adventures, married in haste—all before he reached the age of twenty. We have no testimony as to his domestic happiness, but his public life was certainly stormy. Before beginning his work as an original dramatist he was, as practically all the other successful dramatists have been, for some time an actor and reviser of old plays; and two things must have brought him joy in these laborious years, his friendship with Shakespeare and his appointment as poet laureate. Though his later life was passed in poverty and sickness, his work during this period is mellow and sympathetic toward human weakness. Jonson died in utter destitution, and, as is so often the case, his death heralded his way into fame.

Our present interest in this writer, so conspicuously literary in his own day, is confined to his *Timber, or Discoveries made upon Men and Matter,* a collection of short essays published in 1641. Outwardly the collection seems to be made up of disjointed pieces, one hundred and seventy-one in number, yet these writings

are internally connected and rather systematized. To compare his essays to those of Bacon is to show their inferiority in originality and profundity of thought, but it is at the same time a way of making clear his fervent curiosity of mind. The subject matter of the essays is greatly varied—ethical, literary, critical, educational, political, and historical. In the very interesting essay on style he says of diction: "Custom is the most certain mistress of language, as the public stamp makes the current money. . . . Words borrowed of antiquity do lend a kind of majesty to style. . . . But the eldest of the present, and newest of the past language, is the best." Again he writes, "Some words are to be culled out for ornament and colour, as we gather flowers to strow houses, or make garlands; but they are better when they grow to our style." His sentences on style are well illustrated in his own writing; his words indeed grow to his style. The simple subject is treated in a simple way, and when there is need he can rise to the heights of eloquent expression. The effectiveness of his simple dignity is apparent in this bit of reasoning: "No man is so foolish, but may give another good counsel sometimes; and no man is so wise, but may easily err, if he will take no other's counsel but his own. But very few men are wise by their own counsel; or learned by their own teaching. For he that was only taught by himself, had a fool to his master." Add to this proverbial wisdom the unflattering but universal truth compacted into the short sentence "Many men believe not themselves what they would persuade others; and less do the things, which

they would impose on others," and there is no reason left to wonder that Jonson has been accorded a high place in our estimate of aphoristic writers.

John Selden (1584–1654)

The remarkable book of essays, *Table-Talk,* written by John Selden and edited and published by Richard Milward about thirty years after the death of its author, deserves a place among aphoristic writings. These papers are weighty in thought and happy in expression. Considering that the civil strife of the times made for extreme opinions, Selden's moderation is indeed remarkable. One could, for example, scarcely find a more noncommittal, detached statement than this: "Religion is like the Fashion; one Man wears his Doublet slashed, another laced, another plain; but every Man has a Doublet: so every man has his Religion. We differ about Trimming." If the play on words be pardonable, one may say that such a "trimmer" as he would never go to his grave via la guillotine for religious convictions. The same gentleman made this judicious answer when questioned as to whether the Church or the Scripture is the judge of religion: "In truth neither, but the state." In justice to him, however, and as a hint in regard to his style, we quote again: "It was an unhappy Division that has been made between Faith and Works, Though in my Intellect I may divide them: just as in the Candle, I know there is both Light and Heat. But yet put out the Candle, and they are both gone; one remains not

without the other: So it is betwixt faith and works. Nay, in a right Conception, *Fides est opus*; if I believe a thing because I am commanded, that is *Opus*." Evidently Selden knew how to employ "flowers of speech," and thus his writing illustrates the strides English prose was making at this time, albeit they seem to be strides toward euphuism.

The Cornwallis Essays

Under the title *Essays* Sir William Cornwallis published in 1600 a collection that is of interest only because of its historical position and its author's views of the essay. "I hold neither Plutarch's, nor any of those ancient short manner of writings, nor Montaigne's, nor such of this latter time to be rightly termed Essays, for though they be short, yet they are strong, and able to endure the sharpest trial: but mine are Essays, who am but newly prentice to the inquisition of knowledge, and use these papers as a painter's boy a board, that is trying to bring his hand and his fancy acquainted." In the light of this Cornwallis seems to be an excellent example of Jonson's "he that was only taught by himself," and yet how quaintly pretty is his characterization of writing as the attempt to bring the hand and the fancy acquainted. This quotation serves not only to give us an insight into the character of the writer but also to enlighten us as to the general interest which at this time was manifested concerning the essay as a literary form.

Henry Wheeler Shaw (1818–1885)

It is a far cry from the aristocratic Elizabethan, Francis Bacon, to the democratic Yankee, "Josh Billings"; yet it is not too great a distance to be traveled by wisdom, which "reacheth . . . from end to end mightily, and ordereth all things sweetly." The lonely pioneer of young America, toiling through her majestic forests and over her wide, rugged plains, was taught in his close intimacy with the mysterious solitudes of virgin nature a wisdom old as the hills and young as the lark's first matin song. More than any other country America may be said to have produced a uniquely typical son; more than any other country she has taught that son the wisdom of economy of words. The pioneer was, of necessity, a man of few words, for he was a lonely man; and the man of few words is usually the man of wise thoughts and guarded expressions. But scholastic wisdom was denied the pioneer—and what American does not glory in this denial as linked with the life of our glorious Lincoln! Hence, in the speech of the man of the soil there is the crudeness of the unlettered poor, the brilliant crudeness immortalized by that wisest, canniest of Americans, old Josh Billings.

Henry Wheeler Shaw was born in Lanesboro, Massachusetts. He was a student at Hamilton College, and then passed twenty years as deck hand, farmer, and auctioneer. During the last twenty years of his life, which came to an end in Monterey, California, he contributed regularly to the *New York Weekly*. Were it not that fame is so capricious it would not now be necessary

to mention the once so popular works, *Josh Billings, His Book*; *Josh Billings on Ice*; and *Josh Billings' Spice-Box.*

If ever bad grammar and phonetic misspelling could be artistic, they would be so in the aphoristic sayings of Josh Billings. If art were truth to fact, then the language of this sage and uncouth Yankee would be art, for he uses the American language as it is really used by no small number of our countrymen. Granting that the truth of art is something nobler than mere truth to fact and that Josh Billings indeed violates every law of the literary, we cannot but admit that there is, notwithstanding, a canny effectiveness in his written word. The connoisseur in words, for example, who considers every verbal acquisition a delectable titbit for mental rumination, must admit this statement of fact, distasteful though it be: "Young man, when yu hav tew sarch Webster's Dickshionary tew find words big enuff tew convey yure meaning yu kan make up yure mind that yu don't mean mutch."

Love is the most universal passion, whether it be love of God, neighbor, or self, and many wise and profound things have been said of it. Our homely American touches the delicate subject clumsily but tenderly. "When we are more anxus tew pleaze than tew be pleazed, then we are in love in good arnest." And how humanly sweet is this expression of generous, brotherly love. "I don't beleave in total depravity, every man haz sumthing in him to show that God made him." Under his cap and bells Josh Billings is a real student of life. He writes thus to the casuist: "Trusting tew

luck iz only another name for trusting tew laziness. Thare iz no sutch thing az acksidents, if one thing happens by acksident awl things may; Heaven haz no beureau ov acksidents." He has, moreover, keen insight into certain national traits of character. "Put an Englishman into the garden of Eden, and he would find fault with the whole blassted consarn—put a Yankee in, and he would see whare he could alter it to advantage —put an Irishman in, and he would want tew boss the thing—put a Dutchman in, and he would proceed at once to plant it."

"The grate desire ov mi life is tew amuze sumboddy," he writes, and how his desire has been gratified! If, indeed, "thare is virtew in a harty laff," then the world is a holier place because old Josh Billings has passed through it—Josh Billings, who has tucked the secret of virtue into one small aphorism, "If you want tew be good, all yu hav tew do iz tew obey God, luv man, and hate the devil."

Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809–1894)

Holmes, a literary aristocrat descended from Puritans of the "Brahmin caste," was so much a lover of his own books as to claim that a twig from one of his nerves ran to every one of them. With a personality as soothing and yet invigorating as a vernal breeze, this endearing man held up the mirror to himself in his writings and was rightfully pleased to see that the reflection was good. Aphoristic in his sparkling wisdom and in his lovable egotism, he makes his charming self the unifying note of his profound sayings.

Holmes's life may be considered typical of the even tenor of years in his native Cambridge. After his graduation from Harvard he studied law and medicine, taught for a short time at Dartmouth, and then for thirty-five years held the chair of anatomy and physiology in the Harvard Medical School. In addition to his professional duties, he contributed regularly to the *Atlantic Monthly*. His literary productions were enthusiastically received, for he was widely known as the most brilliant conversationalist of the famous Saturday Club of Boston. In this city of his predilection, "the hub of the universe," he passed most of his happy life; and its loving worship was the sunshine of his later years.

Holmes possessed in personality the paradoxical anomaly, a happy-hearted Puritanism; and he is no less paradoxically anomalous in his writings, for he is at the same time contemplative and imaginative, familiar and didactic, pathologically inquisitive and tenderly amusing. With a remarkable power in fashioning analogies, with a very genius for propounding difficult riddles, he is forever furnishing food for reflection that is worthy of Bacon. With all his humor Holmes was, like that wisest of Englishmen, ever aware of his own dignity and of the restraints of good breeding. His writings, true "bagatelles morales," are characterized throughout by a certain tender playfulness which is really but the velvet glove on the firm hand of the scientist and physician. "You never need think," he writes, "you can turn over any old falsehood without a terrible squirming and scattering of the horrid little population that dwells under it." Cruel, yes, but what of the

potential life suppressed beneath the stone, the life so sorely in need of the sun of truth now let upon it? "Then shall beauty—Divinity taking outlines and color—light upon the souls of men as the butterfly, image of the beatified spirit rising from the dust, soars from the shell that held a poor grub, which would never have found wings had not the stone been lifted."

Holmes is essentially a poet, even when he is philosophizing most sagely; and his ideal of poetry is a worthy one. Against the shallow play of the mere trickster in words he sets the glorious achievement of the true poet. "We get beautiful effects from wit,—all the prismatic colors,—but never the object as it is in fair daylight. A pun, which is a kind of wit, is a different and much shallower trick in mental optics; throwing the *shadows* of two objects so that one overlies the other. Poetry uses the rainbow tints for special effects, but always keeps its essential object in the purest white light of truth." It is not difficult to understand why Holmes found conversation with certain of these tricksters exhausting. "There are men of *esprit* who . . . say bright things on all possible subjects, but their zigzags rack you to death. After a jolting half-hour with one of these jerky companions, talking with a dull friend affords great relief. . . . What a comfort a dull but kindly person is, to be sure, at times! A ground-glass shade over a gas-lamp does not bring more solace to our dazzled eyes than such a one to our minds." This from the most brilliant man of the Saturday Club. It is small wonder his conversational powers were known throughout his little world, small wonder that

William Dean Howells commented: "The person who wished to talk when he could listen to Dr. Holmes was his own victim, and always the loser." This fine old gentleman of the New England school is most in evidence in the character of the "Autocrat," presiding over the breakfast table and drawing out the most timid of his fellow boarders, while he uttered his clever and sage comments on the thousand subjects which interest the mind of the truly learned.

Coventry Patmore (1823–1896)

Long before the soul of this mystic, ecstatic with divine love, had left his body—so tenderly described by him as a "little sequestered pleasure-house for God and for His Spouse"—to find the "keen, ethereal bliss" of the Beatific Vision, he composed his own literary epitaph. "I have written little, but it is all my best; I have never spoken when I had nothing to say, nor spared time or labor to make my words true. I have respected posterity; and should there be a posterity which cares for letters, I dare to hope that it will respect me." That Patmore was justified in his hope has been abundantly evidenced. When his poem "The Toys" crept like its own hurt child into the popular heart, no one believed, Patmore least of all, that its little footprints would ever be trodden by the valorous, marching steps of his prose. Like old Ben Jonson, he makes exhausting demands on the intelligence of his reader. His demands are indeed above reason; they reach into the high, clear air of faith. What wonder if

many a reader, shivering in the talons of this eagle-lover of the Divine, flying from peak to peak of mystic ecstasy, blinks and cries in the face of the unshadowed sun, "I cannot see!"

Coventry Patmore journeyed all the way from arrogant agnosticism to the serene faith of a Catholic who walks with God. In his case serenity and ardent, unresting impetuosity were not incompatible. If his faith was ever troubled, it was only by an upward leap toward fuller vision. On the part of this mystic lover of the Divine, apostrophes born of his love of woman proclaim him as a lesser Dante to a Beatrice, more human perhaps than she who inspired the *Divina Commedia*, yet a Beatrice of an influence no less elusive and pervasively controlling. But Patmore, the tender, chivalrous man of the house, is not so gentle in his dealings with things political—dealings such as his fiery jeremiads over democracy.

The tendency to aphoristic writing, so evident in Patmore's *Principles in Art*, *Religio Poetae*, and *The Rod, the Root, and the Flower*, causes many of his readers to consider the essays fragmentary. Francis Thompson, to whom he was the Jonathan of another David, denies that any such weakness mars the composition of his friend. "It might as well be said that the heavens are fragmentary, because the stars are not linked by golden chains. You are given the stars—the central and illuminative suggestions; you are left to work out for yourself, by meditations, the system of which they are the nodal points." The sentimental writer, for example, can find food for reflection in this. "The soul

of pathos, like that of wit, is brevity. . . . Humor is cumulative and diffusive, as Shakespeare, Rabelais, and Dickens well knew; but how many a good piece of pathos has been spoiled . . . by an attempt to make too much of it!" In this admirable essay on pathos Patmore shows his inability to remain long away from contemplation of the heavenly Lover and His dealings with His spouse, the human soul. "Pleasure and beauty —which may be said to be pleasure visible—are without their highest perfection if they are without a touch of pathos. This touch, indeed, accrues naturally to profound pleasure and to great beauty by the mere fact of the incongruity of their earthly surroundings and the sense of isolation, peril, and impermanence caused thereby. It is a doctrine of that inexhaustible and (except by Dante) almost unworked mine of poetry, Catholic theology, that the felicity of the angels and glorified saints and of God himself would not be perfect without the edge of pathos, which it receives from the fall and reconciliation of man. Hence, on Holy Saturday the Church exclaims, 'O felix culpa!' and hence 'there is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine righteous who need no repentance.' Sin, says St. Augustine, is the necessary shadow of heaven; and pardon, says some other, is the highest light of its beatitude." Patmore, like Thompson, saw in sorrow the "shade of God's hand outstretched caressingly." Patmore was, indeed, wise according to God, wise in a simplicity of intention that aimed at God, wise in a purity of heart that could pene-

trate the necessity and the meaning of heaven and hell, wise in a love that tended upwards and was not to be detained by things of earth.

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CHAPTER III

THE CHARACTER ESSAY

The proper study of mankind is man.—Pope

Background

The more old-fashioned a thing is, nowadays, the more is it ultramodern. First copies of books, antique furniture, colonial corsages, all command fabulous prices from the nouveaux riches. One likes to consider this turning backward an evidence that really fine things are never lost in humanity's onward march. Especially does one like to witness the revival of old literature, which is the soul's one earthly immortality. An old literary form which, beyond peradventure, deserves modern devotees is the character essay of the seventeenth century. To turn from the busy and forgetful world to these most human of all essays is as sweetly refreshing as to wander in an old-fashioned garden or to drink from a spring of living waters. Quaint in diction and spelling, quaint in thought, quaint yet up-to-date in perennial humanness, are these old essays of an earlier day. The sweet, whimsical fancies, the stilted ways of thinking, the vivifying spirit and the rejuvenating comments of their comradely authors who so loved humanity, furnish solace and refreshment to the

reader, especially to the reader who perchance has grown sad and weary on his journey through life.

The character essay became very popular in England in the early part of the seventeenth century, when the great Elizabethan period was drawing to its close and Puritan ascendancy was beginning to exercise an influence on English life and thought. The *Euphues* of John Lyly had planted among the flowers in the field of English prose the weedy growth that bears his name, only to make those flowers seem more richly natural by contrast to the ornate foliage, the tiresome blossoming into odd conceits, the general artificiality, of euphuism. The drama, in rising to the height of its power, had not only taught people how important a thing in literature is the making of lifelike characters, but by its constant demands on their poverty-stricken literary resources had compelled them to go back to the Greeks and Romans and to study that master of charactery, Seneca. The morality play, which featured virtues and vices by personification, though it had been changed by the master dramatist, carrying out the new conception of virtues and vices as embodied compositely in single men, into magnificent portrayals of life itself, still lingered with colorful effect in the minds of the play-loving English people. In those days, when printing was novel, literature was considered a pleasant recreational luxury rather than a profession; hence writers were willing to try the interesting experiment of creating and analyzing human beings of their own making. Interest in charactery had been given a new impetus when, in 1592, Casaubon published a translation of Theophrastus's

Characters, and Bacon furnished the means to the end —a concise, sententious style of prose writing in which studies of human qualities could be set forth.

Definition

The character essay is a short prose composition, usually in a lively, satiric vein, yet with a touch of human sympathy, which creates and then analyzes concrete persons embodying the virtues and vices most prevalent among men. It may contain matter of historical moment, or it may be pure fiction. The author may tickle with the straw of humor or sting with the stiletto of wit. Very often the essay pretends to be a letter from some neighboring place and to bring "news," or (as we should say) gossip, about some of the foibles and follies of the persons who live there. Sometimes it asks the reader the embarrassing question "Is this not you?" which question is the sure guaranty of literary immortality. The character essay being a bit of human nature made concrete has themes that are many but not exhaustless.

Thomas Dekker (*c.* 1570–1641)

It is always difficult to label and pigeonhole a writer whose work illustrates a transition from one literary form to another. Thomas Dekker is one of these *sui generis* authors who are the nightmare of the historian of literature; yet he is such a dear and beguiling essayist, such a Santa Claus among writers, with his essays tucked full of queer and whimsical whatnots, that we

shall ignore wiser opinions and shall class him first among a group of writers to whom he may not, in strict classification, belong. He is, at least, a rich relation of their family, whose literary wealth is to be for their successors a unique inheritance. However, Dekker was not, strictly speaking, the pioneer in the field of the character essay. Early in the sixteenth century John Awdeley, a printer, brought out a curious little collection of definitions or embryo essays called *Fraternity of Vagabonds.* Then, in 1566, Thomas Harman published a volume of essays, *Caveat, or Warning for Common Cursetors, vulgarly called Vagabonds,* which shows not only familiarity but humorous sympathy with "the knights of the road." Moreover, Wilson's *Art of Rhetoric* makes clear that practice in the writing of character sketches was an integral part of education in medieval days.

Of Dekker the man we know nothing except what he has told us in his writings, yet his works reveal to us a poet and historian of no mean merit. His prose is a veritable storehouse of information regarding his times, and it shows his power of understanding his contemporaries. Of Nash he writes, "Ingenious and ingenuous, fluent, facetious, T. Nash, from whose abundant pen honey flowed to thy friends, and mortal aconite to thy enemies." A fine example of the skill of the character writer is shown in his picture of Hospitality. "Against this wretch (A Niggard), (in braue defiance) stept forth an old Lord (that is now no Courtier; for hee keeps a place in the Countrey, and all the chimnies in it smoke: he spends his money as he spends the water that passeth

to his house, it comes thither in great pipes, but it is all consumed in his kichen,) his name *Hospitality*. It is a graue and reuerend countenance; he weares his beard long of purpose,—that the hairs being white, and still in his eie, he may be terrified from doing anything unworthy their honour: . . . So, though the tree of his uertues grow high, and is laden with goodly fruit, yet the top-bough of all, and the fairest Apple of all, he counteth his *Hospitality*: . . . Hee giues considerably euery houre, but in reuerence of one season in the yeare, all that come may freely take."

Besides his art in character drawing Dekker has other claims to recognition; a dramatist of real skill, a poet of powerful imagination, he could handle the long sentence with a power rare in his day, and he was capable of genuine eloquence. There are few finer things in early literature than his apostrophe to the great city in *The Seuen Deadly Sinnes of London*. "*O London*, thou art great in glory, and enuied for thy greatnes: thy Towers, thy Temples, and thy Pinnacles stand vpon thy head like borders of fine gold, thy waters like frindges of siluer hang at the hemmes of thy garments. Thou art the goodliest of thy neighbors, but the proudest; the wealthiest, but the most wanton. Thou hast all things in thee to make thee fairest, and all things in thee to make thee foulest: . . . What miseries haue of late ouertaken thee? Yet (like a fool that laughs when hee is putting on fetters) thou hast bin merry in height of thy misfortunes." *The Belman of London* (1608), with its clever description of rogues,

can be classed as nothing else than charactery and perhaps the very finest charactery that has come down to us through the years.

Joseph Hall (1574–1656)

This early master of the gentle art of character drawing is usually grouped with Overbury and Earle as the great trinity of artists in this type of essay. Hall makes no secret of his indebtedness to the ancients, "the divines of the heathens," who, he says, in the preface to his *Characters of Virtues and Vices*, "bestowed their time in drawing out the true lineaments of every virtue and vice, so lively, that who saw the medals might know the face: which art they significantly termed charactery."

This "Christian Seneca" was always in his youth the satirist and the controversialist because always the churchman fighting not only to "check the misordered world" but also to maintain church discipline, always the zealot plying the lash against vice, always cutting away with his keen satiric rapier the shreds of respectability from hypocritical "Scribblers, Parsons, Physicians, Lawyers," while his shrinking victims tried in vain to hide themselves from the newly awakened scorn of mankind. In his later years he was more mellow and gave us character drawings which have the necessary touch of human sympathy. He has a terse, simple, spirited style, and his pictures are true to the human life of all time. Of the Unthrift, in the essay under that title, he says: "His expense is measured, not by ability,

but will. His pleasures are immoderate, and not honest. . . . The vulgar sort call him bountiful; and applaud him while he spends; and recompense him with wishes when he gives, with pity when he wants: neither can it be denied that he wrought true liberality, but overwent it: no man could have lived more laudably, if, when he was at the best, he had stayed there."

Though Bishop Hall is better known for his part in the history of the English Church than for his essay writing, we can see the reason for Lamb's judgment that his literary fitness justified the classification of him as an essayist. Truly Hall seems to have possessed the requisites: fresh and effective wit, a happy, graphic style, an inexhaustible power of illustration, profound knowledge of the Scriptures, an experienced understanding of human nature and its needs, careful training in Latin models, and, finally, an evident sincerity of purpose.

Sir Thomas Overbury (1581–1613)

Overbury, one of the recruits of Euphues and master of one of the most artificial styles imaginable, could write pages of nothing in very clever fashion. As he died at an early age his pedantry may have resulted from that temporary stiffness of mind which usually afflicts for some years the scholar whose school has fed him more intellectual nourishment than his decidedly limited mind can assimilate. Weighted by his knowledge, Overbury usually journeys just below the level upon which good straight prose travels, though at times his poetic genius carries him along above the level.

Being one of those writers who keep notebooks full of witty phrases heard or invented, he drew characters that set forth his notes rather than human nature; but somehow, despite this and despite the fact that we resent his evident desire to be clever, we realize the truth of the point he has made. When he observes that "a fine gentleman is the Cynemon tree, whose bark is more worth than his body," what better characterization could we ask? When he forgets manner of expression and writes from his heart he is really fine. How homely and tender is his picture of "the Milk-mayd," who "makes her hand hard with labour, and her heart soft with pitty; and when winter evenings fall early, sitting at her merry wheele, she sings a defiance to the giddy wheele of fortune. . . . She dares goe alone, and unfold sheepe i' th' night, and feares no manner of ill, because she meanes none." Perhaps it would not be inappropriate to say the same thing of Overbury—this writer who so aptly, though unhappily for himself, called his *Characters* in a subtitle "conceited news," who desired merely to be witty and amusing—and so to dismiss him without treating him to any manner of ill, because he meant none.

John Earle (1601–1665)

The best of the trio, John Earle, was born at York and was educated at Oxford. Though he rose to prominence in the Church and did much to advance the learning of his time, winning from Clarendon the tribute that "he was among the few excellent men who never had, nor never could have an enemy," we are concerned only

with his little book of characters published in 1628, which went through ten editions during his lifetime and finally contained seventy-eight characters. As the book was written while the author was still in school we find a predominance of university types and evidence of narrow experience. The title of the book, *Micro-cosmographie,* shows Earle's conception of each character as a little world in himself, and the author's insight into human nature gives something of universality to the university town.

Filled with the joy of living, quick to catch the ridiculous, witty in the way of unaffected piety rather than from any inspiration of malice, fairly bristling in his contempt for hypocrisy, Earle always makes his point in a charming way. The "Shee precise" Hypocrite, according to his slyly pointed comment, "knowes her owne place in heauen as perfectly, as the Pew shee has a key to. Shee is so taken vp with Faith, shee has noe room for Charity." His quaint love of fun enlivens him at every social gathering, and he chuckles to himself as he watches the "meere formall" man who, in his effort to be agreeable, "apprehends a jest by seeing men smile, and laughes orderly himselfe, when it comes to his turne." How delightful this to those of us who have had our most excruciating laughs at the expense of such "meere formall" persons. How many times has it been said no less bitterly, though less cleverly, "The best cure he [a mere dull physician] ha's done is vpon his own purse, which from a leane ficklinesse he hath made lusty, and in flesh." Of a child he has given this tender picture: "He is purely happy, because he knows no euill, nor hath

made meanes by sinne to bee acquainted with misery. Hee arriues not at the mischiefe of being wise, nor endures euils to come by foreseeing them. . . . Could hee put off his body with his little Coate he had got eternitie without a burthen, and exchaug'd but one Heauen for another."

Always more concerned with matter than with manner, perhaps because the latter was his gift, Earle drew his characters from life. In this fact lies his superiority to Overbury. As an ethical teacher he is at his best in such essays as "A graue Diuine," "A vulgar-spirited Man," "A stayed Man." In these essays there is little of the fun which characterizes his less serious productions; the writer having perceived the tremendous mystery of human life can but state it reverently as a mystery and be silent.

Thomas Fuller (1608–1661)

Fuller was perhaps the first to realize the humorous possibilities of the essay; indeed, he may be considered the literary grandfather of the genial Lamb. Fuller inserted endless stories in his essays, being simply garrulous in his writing. He would listen all day to the prattle of tedious old persons for the purpose of gathering anecdotes and proverbial wisdom; he stored up humorous memories of his days as army chaplain; in a word, he chuckled habitually even when he was preaching most seriously. Lamb calls his writings "the golden works of the dear, fine, silly, old angel," and we pronounce Lamb's characterization correct when we fall under the charm of Fuller. Gifted as he was with one

of the most remarkable memories in the history of man, even making allowance for the strain some of his biographers put upon our credulity, profoundly learned, old-fashioned yet up-to-date in his everlasting humanness, and boyishly in love with life, is it any wonder that he is so charming? When so much has been written about an author it usually seems best to let him speak for himself, though Fuller is too fine to suffer even from injudicious praise.

If ever a man had the opportunity to find amusement within himself that man must have been Fuller, for his quaintness of expression can be nothing else than the vesture of quaintness of thought, in so spontaneous a fashion do his quibbles pour forth from him and so sure are we when we read him that life for him was indeed a thing of beauty and a joy forever. One of his most delightful essays begins "Many have been the wise speeches of fools, though not so many as the foolish speeches of wise men," and runs on endlessly with a string of anecdotes that illustrate in ridiculous fashion the wisdom of the fool. How absurd is this "good Parent" with whom he makes us acquainted! "When her neglected son complained that his brother (her darling) had hit and hurt him with a stone, she whipped him only for standing in the way where the stone went which his brother cast." Many of his essays are theological and didactic, yet his sheer joy of living saves him from tediousness; and sometimes when he is most serious his habit of fun-making leads him unconsciously to produce a ridiculous effect. The "faithful Minister," he says, "would pronounce the word *damn* with

such an emphasis as left a doleful echo in his auditors' ears a good while after." And who has ever equaled this description of the negro as "the image of God cut in ebony." Again, he informs us, with doubtful reverence, that the pyramids, "doting with age, have forgotten their founders." Of the "degenerous Gentleman" he writes in his inimitable way: "Having lost his own legs, he relies on the staff of his kindred; first visiting them as an intermitting ague, but afterwards turns a quotidian, wearing their thresholds as bare as his own coat. At last he is as welcome as a storm. . . . Sometimes he sadly paceth over the ground he sold, and is on fire with himself for his folly, but frequently quencheth it at the next alehouse." Fuller seems clearly to be a character writer, yet the constant revelations of his agreeable personality in his writing might easily lead us to think we are reading what is formally known as the familiar essay. The full intimacy that accompanies his use of the pronoun "I," and his expression of personal opinions as personal opinions, are as winning as they are unusual in a writer of this early period. There is about his writings an indefinable atmosphere which leads one to read on and on, with the lure of a spring day in the woods.

Others of the School

George Herbert (1593–1633) gives us a delightful character in the hero of *The Country Parson,* which volume aims to make religion pleasing by delineation of a lovable saint. The thirty-seven chapters give us almost as many phases of the parson's life among his

people. Herbert differs from the other character essayists in being more concerned with his subject than with the display of his own cleverness. Nicholas Breton (1545–1626) is an inferior disciple of Bacon who uses the subjects of his greater master as mere means for the exercise of verbal cleverness. It is sufficient merely to mention Geffray Mynshul, Wye Saltonstall, Donald Lupton, and Sir William Coventry. Francis Thompson is inclined to consider Samuel Butler (1612–1680) the best character writer of all, declaring that his essays "are witty and full of Hudibrastic point; while the style is vernacular, clear, and strong." Butler lived in bitter times, and the effect on him is shown in "A Modern Politician" and "An Hypocritical Nonconformist." Strangely enough his times have been perpetuated in the bitter controversies that have waged about his writings, for he has been perseveringly praised and blamed with equal extravagance. Perhaps the main reason why he is disliked is his greatness, a greatness compelled to find expression in pitiless exposition of the littleness of those about him.

Laura Spencer Portor

Life is sometimes unexpectedly kind, and one of its surprises is the restoration of a treasure supposedly long since lost. The lover of the character essay of the seventeenth century can but see how life treasures its whimsies when he has the good fortune to come upon the essays of Laura Spencer Portor. For this entrancing poet and short-story writer is above all a character essayist. In her most autobiographical writing, in her

criticism, in her occasional philosophizing, she is everlastingly drawing portraits. In the essay "My French School Days," where we learn that she came of a people who loved languages, we are given not only a sympathetic interpretation of the French method of education "by discovery" but are introduced to some very interesting persons as well. Her learning all through life seems to have been by a method of discovery. In the childhood home so tenderly described in the essay "Guests" she was educated most of all by the guests constantly coming and going in accordance with the hospitable custom of the times. And how we come to know these guests! "Miss Lou Brooks," for example, that "glass of fashion and mould of form," was to her five-year-old eyes the embodiment of all the world's beauty. Then came into her life "Doctor Highway," who "would be classified readily now as a Christian gentleman of highest honor, brilliant gifts, and scientific attainments. But the name scientist was not in those days worn so easily. Huxley and Darwin were old but yet alive, as were many who still believed them to be emissaries of the devil." And how she was thrilled when the Doctor crashed his fist upon the table at a careless touch on his ideas of truth. Then there was the "young Byronic musician with the extraordinary tenor voice," who wrote in her autograph book, "Music, my only love, the only bride I'll ever claim," but who later "seemed to have repented his resolve and forgotten the album, for . . . he claimed some two brides besides music. This, however, did not alter his educational value; that remained unspoiled." The next guest of impor-

tance was poor Mrs. Rankin, "born untimely, cut off by the custom of those days from the delights of militancy, foredoomed to pass out of life with never the joy of smashing a single window." The writer's power of hero worship was soon after awakened by the poet Eugene Ashton, who "had been into distant countries of the soul," whose gray eyes were "as young as the young moon and as many centuries old," and whose death gave "new splendor to the dead."

Besides these guests of friendship there were the relatives, great-uncles and great-aunts who "brought with them the spirits of ancestors" and "lent a dignity to life." "Aunt Sarah" had about her "the refinement and delicacy of a rare old vase." "Great-aunt Henrietta" was "a living chronicle, an accurate if inglorious historian; . . . a sort of Pepys in petticoats and neckerchief." This contact with friends and relatives was for her a real education. "I am convinced," she writes, "that it was mainly by my reading of these men and women with whom the world of my childhood was peopled and whom the gracious habit of visiting brought within my ken, that I came later to recognize and enjoy the best authors and the best literature." The conclusion of this essay is superb in its tribute to the Master "in whose House of Life we do but for a time visit, . . . some adding truth or dignity of our own; some possessed of foibles and accomplished in failures . . . all of us understood, condoned, valued, pitied, loved by the Master of the House."

The whimsical little book *Adventures in Indigence* is a riot of characters, quaint, modern, good, bad, but all

most human. One desires to rename some of the essays. "Musgrove" could be "A degenerous Gentleman"; "Margharetta," "A foolish Parent"; "Mamie Faffelfinger," "A foolish Virgin,"—so much has the writer caught the spirit of the seventeenth-century character essayists. Human nature is such an old-fashioned modernism; and as regards universal characteristics of humanity there is nothing new under the sun. There is Ernest, now, wanting royal opportunity. "To be sober, trustworthy, honorable, daily dependable—these were too trifling! Give him something worthy of his powers." Then there is Margaret, "so bent, since the foundation of the world, on proving herself right and everybody else wrong . . . a very piece of humanity—humanity, the ancient, the amusing, the faulty, the pathetic, the endeared." Laura Spencer Portor has caught the true relation of life to literature, and she finds in her adventures among the poor many persons whom she knew first in stories. "Deal with them but long enough, and you shall have strange suspicions. You shall begin to note a growing and undeniable likeness in these to 'Cinderella' and 'The Youngest Brother.' Nor are these fairy tales, mind you, safe and unbelievable, . . . but fairy tales potent and indisputable . . . hanging out your clothes of a Monday." This writer makes one sigh for more books from her pen. She is so sweetly, tenderly human in all her ways, but most of all in her understanding and interpretation of the heart of childhood. And is not the child the heart of humanity?

CHAPTER IV

THE CLASSIC ESSAY

Books are the immortal sons defying their sires.—PLATO

BACKGROUND

The classic essay had a long and troubled infancy. Romanticism, its arch-enemy, numbering among its allies the political, the social, and the moral forces of the times, won over the early Elizabethan dramatists from the disposition to make the English drama conform to Senecan models. Literature being the reflection of life, the struggle of romanticism or freedom of thought against the intellectual monarchy erected by the Italian and French dramatists and critics of the Renaissance upon a thorough misunderstanding and misinterpretation of Greek dramaturgy—a monarchy which, frankly aristocratic, bound literature under its unbending rules—is paralleled by the revolt of the newborn democratic spirit in politics, which won its hard-fought battle against despotism through the establishment of the English Commonwealth. This spirit is also reflected in the Reformation, of which the chief aim was to make every man his own law in regard to his soul. The Elizabethan dramatists, though they achieved romanticism in their technique, in their limit-

less scope of subject matter, and in their freedom of spirit, retained the English ideals of monarchy in their character drawing. How few of Shakespeare's heroes and heroines are of other than the blood royal! But the dramatists of the Commonwealth and of the Restoration, in accordance with the new spirit of democracy, began to see the importance of the common man as a possible character in the play. However, the drama had in the meantime fallen into such disrepute because of its degenerating into a mere political organ and because of Puritan disapproval that its force in literature became insignificant. Its one great master among the inferior contemporaries and successors of Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, took his stand for "classic art," and his school carried on his tradition through the confused and pessimistic years of the Puritan Age, when all England trembled at the beheading of a king and at the abyss of Hell with its many heretofore unperceived avenues now made known by stern-voiced preachers—avenues down which an avenging God, who was thought to deny all the helpful restraints of grace, was driving His terror-stricken creatures.

Encouraged by a long-surviving prejudice among lovers of literature against the "degradation" of literary forms in the attempt to model them along romantic and democratic lines, and strengthened at intervals by the tonic qualities of style of a Sir Thomas Browne and a Milton, classicism prolonged its feeble existence through the severe years of the Commonwealth, the laxity of the Restoration, and suddenly attained its full strength in the Queen Anne period, to which it gave its name,

the Classic Age. The Renaissance, as we have observed, is of course to be reckoned with in any history of classicism, for this great movement was concerned with the revival of classic learning. It came into England by way of France, and as the result of its coming English writers were soon imitating the style of the four great rhetoricians then so popular in France—Lucan, Ovid, Seneca, and Cicero.

Definition

The term "classic" admits of three interpretations: in general it applies to all the great literary works of a nation; in a more limited sense it designates a period in which a number of great works by various authors is produced; in a very technical sense it applies to the inspiration, matter, and manner of individual pieces of literature. In attempting to define the classic essay we are concerned only with the third meaning, an elaboration of which will permit, without real digression, a brief inquiry into Hegel's exposition of Greek classicism, because the theory to which he gave definite form had been exercising a strong though unobtrusive influence on literature during the whole of the century preceding him. Granted that it may not help much in our efforts to "clear the ground," a summary of Hegel's theory will nevertheless be of interest here, if for no other reason than that he is reputed to have achieved the "classic" exposition of classicism. The term "classic," as defined by Hegel in his *Æsthetics*, applies to the middle, or Greek, stage in the development of art.

The symbolic, or first, stage was the result of two forces. Man, finding himself a body in a world of touch, sound, and sight, and not yet knowing himself as a free spirit capable of existing without dependence on matter, looked upon the world as a gigantic and bewildering riddle. Prompted by the instinct of unity which is "derived from his own unity as a self," he tried to find a unifying First Principle. This vague idea of a First Principle had to find expression, and since it had no exact outward representation it caused man's imagination to create a symbol which would embody it in something external to himself. But there is in man also an instinct for the beautiful which caused him to desire that the thing, the symbol, be in itself an object of beauty. Thus symbolic art was born. Being the product of an artist who did not comprehend the spiritual, symbolic art was necessarily weighed down by the material, enmeshed in the physical. Hence we find in the art of primitive peoples an earthiness, a repose, a fixedness as of mountains.

The second, or classic, stage in the mind's search for a satisfactory conception of the First Principle was characterized by a comprehension of the spiritual, but the spiritual as dependent upon the material and necessarily embodied in it. The Greek gods of Olympus, whose doings, though more independent than those of man, were accomplished "under the conditions of the actual physical universe," were the inevitable offspring of this quest. But the Olympian gods being dependent on matter were constantly changing, and the Greek mind, still seeking the First Principle, rested for a time

in the conception of it as a Fate, whose function in the drama is too well known to need consideration here. The classic phase of thought found expression also in Greek sculpture and architecture, which were airy and poised as though about to spring from earth. The miracle of Greek art is that though it did not attain to the conception of the spiritual as independent of matter, it never violated the union which exists naturally between moral and physical beauty. The chastity of Greek sculpture has never been surpassed because of the simple fact that their artists could not conceive moral ugliness united to physical beauty; and the Greek love of the beautiful made their concrete embodiment of it in every kind of art equally unsurpassable. In the technical sense, so perfect that it has been the model for all art even to the present day, there was in Greek, or classic, art a restraint, a lack of freedom, a narrowness of scope, that resulted naturally from the Greek conception of the spiritual as dependent on the material. In a word, the personal or subjective viewpoint was not yet achieved.

The third, or romantic, stage began with the Christian Era, for then man discovered his worth as an individual and realized that the spiritual is independent of the material. Then he understood that the world, which he had considered his master, is really a thing which he can direct to his own ends, which he can mold upon the forms of his own spiritual creations. Romanticism, then, expresses man's realization of his spiritual freedom; and its rules, its scope of subject matter, its freedom, are determined and limited only by his soul.

All this would have little to do with the classic essay were it not that this theory of classicism worked surely though unobtrusively for the final degeneration of classic artistry in prose. In the beginning the classic essayists attempted with splendid results to model their prose upon the rules established by the great writers of Greece and Rome. For vision which pierced through character and landscape with a single illuminative glance,—the vision of the romanticist,— the classic artist substituted leisurely, detailed observation; living words fraught with creative power gave place to scientific abstractions; "idle sports of the imagination" surrendered in the face of cold, calculating reason, which defined, developed, and concluded. Besides these changes in inspiration, matter, and diction, there was a greater change in style. The "ill-digested," unfinished style of the earlier essayists was succeeded by polished, formal expression which balanced idea against idea, phrase against phrase, and enunciated general truths in definite form, making of them the strong threads in a closely woven, sparkling web of thought. All this was English classicism in its glory, and even the most ardent lover of romanticism can but admire it and admit that it exercised some beneficial influence on the development of English literature. The artistic climax of the classic movement was followed by its rapid downfall, though Hegel's influence delayed for some time its final disintegration and unpopularity. Classicism soon degenerated into an elegant but superficial formalism, as external as cultured manners that do not spring from inward virtue. In poetry this artificiality found ade-

quate expression in the fine polish of the heroic couplet, as notoriously immortalized by Pope; in prose it became dull, argumentative, a poorly tied bundle of classifications. The classic essay in the hands of its masters may be defined as a formal composition, built upon definite rules, which is characterized by restraint, by conscious effort on the part of the author toward perfection of style, by a tendency toward the controversial and the objective, and, finally, by its power of literary exposition.

Early Classicists

Since the authors in the age immediately following that of Shakespeare not only lacked the creative vigor of the Elizabethans but possessed genius only for the vernacular style, the pioneer classicists, as contrasted to those of the eighteenth century, have fallen into obscurity. However, there are at least three writers who deserve mention before we come to the masters in the classic essay, for they had influence upon its development.

Robert Burton (1577–1640)

Burton was a hypochondriac in mind and in body, as is shown in his life's work, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, which, he says, was composed with a view of relieving his melancholy, but increased it to such a degree, that nothing could make him laugh, but going to the bridge-foot and hearing the ribaldry of the bargemen, which rarely failed to throw him into a violent fit of laughter. This morose gentleman was the victim of mental over-

feeding, as is apparent in his works. "He is never-ending; words, phrases, overflow, are heaped up, repeated, and flow on, carrying the reader along, deafened, wearied, half-drowned, unable to touch ground in the deluge." Anyone who reads two pages of Burton will agree with this sentence of Taine. Yet this pessimist is to be remembered as the one who secularized the essay by changing it from a vehicle of moral expression to a regular omnibus for ideas, and who directed in truly classic style the flood of his erudition into orderly rivers and channels. Doctor Johnson once remarked that Burton's *Anatomy* was the only book which could get him out of his bed two hours before he wished to rise. How fortunate the modern "lier in bed," whom custom permits to read poor Burton without requiring in return such a sacrifice as that made by Johnson.

Sir Thomas Browne (1605–1682)

By writing with eyes "fixed on the stars" Browne widened the scope of the essay. Truly was he divorced from worldly affairs. When royalty was tottering to its fall he published his *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, inquiring with the utmost gravity into the existence of the phœnix and the death song of the swan. When all England was in an uproar over the return of Charles II, Browne asked of her to read his dreamily meditative *Urn Burial*. His most famous work, *Religio Medici*, written at Shipdon Hall, Halifax, about 1635, is in the essay spirit and is of special interest for the reason that it made Charles Lamb so much its debtor, for Lamb's "Dream Children:

A Reverie" may be said to have borrowed its manner from Browne's meditation. "Surely it is not a melancholy conceit to think we are all asleep in this World, and that the conceits of this life are as mere dreams to those of the next; as the Phantasms of the night, to the conceits of the day. . . . We are somewhat more than ourselves in our sleeps, and the slumber of the body seems to be but the waking of the soul. It is the ligation of sense, but the liberty of reason. . . . Were my memory as faithful as my reason is then fruitful, I would never study but in my dreams, and this time also would I choose for my devotions: but our grosser memories have then so little hold of our abstracted understandings, that they forget the story, and can only relate to our awaked souls, a confused and broken tale of that that hath passed." This from Browne; yet the faithful memory of heartbroken love gave to the awakening understanding of the prince of essayists his dream children in the most beautiful and poignant dream in all literature, except, perhaps, Kipling's "They." *Miscellany Tracts and Miscellanies* shows Browne's mastery of the art of writing cadenced prose and wins for him a place among classic essayists. His chief merit is his faultless style and, more particularly, his mastery of the sonorous periodic sentence. "And since death must be the *Lucina* of life, and even Pagans could doubt, whether thus to live, were to dye. Since our longest sunne sets at right descensions, and makes but winter arches, and therefore it cannot be long before we lie down in darknesse, and have our light in ashes. Since the brother of death daily haunts us with dying

memento's, and time that grows old in itself, bids us hope no long duration: Diuturnity is a dream and folly of expectation." Browne had, however, the one great fault of the classic writers, pedantry of diction, the use of learned words because they are learned, as is most manifested in *The Garden of Cyrus*. As this fault was more easily imitated by his successors than were his virtues, there is reason for Coleridge's statement that Browne was the first who "effectually injured the literary taste of the nation." Yet shall we censure Browne because, having delved to the depths of Greek and Latin writers, he allowed his profound erudition to find expression in the style perfected by his masters? Shall we not rather admit that the strong are not always at fault when, in scaling the mountains, they hurl stumblingblocks down on the way of the weak, who are struggling in the valleys below?

Abraham Cowley (1618–1667)

Cowley loved to write in the first person and to be very intimate with his reader. Lamb called his essays "delicious," and preferred their "graceful rambling" to the "elegance and grace of Addison." "Of Myself" shows Cowley at his best as a reflective spectator of life: "I confess I love littleness in almost all things. A little convenient estate, a little cheerful house, a little company, and a very little feast." This delightful and very human desire was doubtless born of his weary disgust at the dissolute court of Charles II, who, during his exile, had enlisted Cowley's sympathy. In all the writings of this born essayist there is the genuine English

idiom made into a live, flowing melody of composition; and there lingers about his essays a suggestion of his own little house, with ample gardens and pleasant meadows attached. To read Cowley is to bathe one's soul in an atmosphere of sweetness, in an old-world air as perennially charming and soothing as the scent-laden wind from an old-fashioned garden.

John Milton (1608–1674)

This great writer was born in London, the son of a scrivener, and was educated at Christ's College, Cambridge, where his personal beauty won for him the name "the lady of Christ's." Milton was a born student. "My father destined me from a child to the pursuits of literature; and my appetite for knowledge was so voracious, that, from twelve years of age, I hardly ever left my studies, or went to bed before midnight. . . . My eyes were naturally weak, and I was subject to frequent head-aches; which, however, could not chill the ardour of my curiosity, or retard the progress of my improvement." This same zealous intensity of purpose when later directed toward controversial writing in behalf of his country caused him to make the tremendous sacrifice of his eyesight that he might complete his splendid *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio*. Fortunately for the development of his genius Milton spent some years after his withdrawal from college in retirement at his father's country home. Then, after a period of travel and study in Europe, he returned to England to devote himself to the defense of the Puritan cause. This period of his life is well summarized by Francis

Thompson. "Twenty-four years of prose drudgery, immortalized only through a genius which turned to gold whatever it touched, is a record of self-command not matched in the history of poets, or matched only partially by Goethe." This prose drudgery made Milton no less the leader in thought during the Commonwealth than was Cromwell the leader in action. In his miserable last years Milton, poor, sightless, disappointed in all his hopes, achieved in *Paradise Lost* a marvel of literary production that has never been equaled in the history of literature.

Milton the poet overshadows Milton the prose writer, a fact to be deplored. Macaulay voices our common regret in this matter. "It is to be regretted that the prose writings of Milton should, in our time, be so little read. As compositions, they deserve the attention of every man who wishes to become acquainted with the full power of the English language. They abound with passages, compared with which the finest declamations of Burke sink into insignificance. They are a perfect field of cloth of gold. The style is stiff with gorgeous embroidery. Not even in the earlier books of the *Paradise Lost* has the great poet ever risen higher than in those parts of his controversial works in which his feelings, excited by conflict, find a vent in bursts of devotional and lyric rapture. It is, to borrow his own majestic language, 'a sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and harping symphonies!'" A classicist in form, Milton is a romanticist in the varied richness of his subject. Usually writing in the controversial vein, he is, in intensity of feeling and virility of attack, a polemic writer.

Even in the face of Macaulay's panegyric we maintain that Milton has not the mastery of prose which he has of poetry, and that his handling of the periodic style is often cumbersome and obscure. Though attempting to follow the Baconian tradition of instructing, he usually upbraids and accuses. The *Areopagitica, a Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing*, in reality an essay which has long been considered the classic defense of liberty of speech, illustrates his tendency to passionate tirade. "When a man writes to the world, he summons up all his reason and deliberation to assist him; he searches, meditates, is industrious, and likely consults and confers with his judicious friends; after all which done, he takes himself to be informed in what he writes, as well as any that wrote before him; if in this, the most consummate act of his fidelity and ripeness, no years, no industry, no former proof of his abilities, can bring him to that state of maturity, as not to be still mistrusted and suspected, unless he carry all his considerate diligence, all his midnight watchings, and expense of Palladian oil, to the hasty view of an unleisured licenser, perhaps much his younger, perhaps far his inferior in judgment, perhaps one who never knew the labor of bookwriting; and if he be not repulsed, or slighted, must appear in print like a puny with his guardian, and his censor's hand on the back of his title to be his bail and surety, that he is no idiot or seducer; it cannot be but a dishonor and derogation to the author, to the book, to the privilege and dignity of learning." Gigantic periods, weighty and prolonged figures, blasts of eloquence, poetic outbursts, torrents

of abuse arising from fanatical anger, exalted passion, yet ever the man of the Renaissance—harsh and pedantic—is Milton the prose writer.

Doctor Samuel Johnson (1709–1784)

Of all writers since the world began the most intimately known to us was born of a bookseller at Lichfield. After attending Pembroke College and spending some time as a mediocre teacher in his native town, he went in 1737 to London, where he became the literary dictator of his day and the hero of the greatest biography ever written, a hero whose daily living was simply the personal manifestation of his great writings, whose "good deeds were as many as his good sayings." During his whole life he was poor, melancholy, repulsive in appearance and manner, yet no social function or gathering could be complete without the "dear old bear." In the literary club which he founded, this "tender despot," in whose heart there was room "even for Hodge the cat," domineered Burke, Reynolds, Garrick, and Goldsmith; and his abused but faithful watchdog, Boswell, has given us the opportunity of hearing these great men talk and argue. During the eight years in which Johnson compiled the dictionary he contributed two hundred and eight essays to *The Rambler*, many to *The Adventurer*, and a regular series called *The Idler* to *The Universal Chronicle*. *Rasselas*, Boswell tells us, was composed in the evenings of one week to defray his mother's funeral expenses—no mean achievement for one who has been described as indolent. Preferring poverty, which was his own, to affluence, which he could

have secured from patronage, Johnson was ever an independent writer. "I have seldom descended to the arts by which favour is obtained. . . . I shall never envy the honors which wit and learning obtain in any other cause, if I can be numbered among the writers who have given ardour to virtue, and confidence to truth." Such boldness and integrity in such an age need no comment. The dear old man comes very close to us when we read his will, one of his most characteristic productions, which begins, "I bequeath to God a soul polluted with many sins, but I hope purified by repentance, and I trust redeemed by Jesus Christ," and contains bequests to brewer, churchman, artist, bookseller, and servant, mentioned in his simple, indiscriminating way. With no redeeming grace of manner, punishing himself for even the slightest faults, morbid because of the scrupulosity which clung like a leech to his conscience, with a power of dissembling his real feelings which was about as effective as a window, glad to be the good Samaritan to any needy person he met, Johnson was appointed to do great things in the world, and he did them well.

Boswell's opinion that Johnson's purpose in writing was to come forth "in the character for which he was eminently qualified—a majestick teacher of moral and religious wisdom," is confirmed in the great man's own words, "It has been my principal design to inculcate wisdom and piety," though this preceptor adds, rather apologetically, "I have allotted few papers to the idle sports of the imagination." There are strength of purpose and power for securing abiding results even in his

"idle sports of the imagination." In the final issue of *The Rambler* he reveals the two objects of his essay writing, which were to determine once for all the dignity of the English prose essay and to establish genuine and just literary criticism by uniform exaltation of intellect and soul and by regard for the simple, the homely, and the pure. That he attained some measure of success in these endeavors may be judged from the facts that since Johnson's day writers have trained themselves for essay writing as deliberately as for dramatic, fictive, and poetic composition and that literary criticism soon attained to the qualities which he desired it to have. As the compiler of the first noteworthy English dictionary Johnson naturally would exercise an important influence on diction. The nature of this influence he describes thus: "I have laboured to refine our language to grammatical purity, and to clear it from colloquial barbarisms, licentious idioms, and irregular combinations. Something, perhaps, I have added to the elegance of its construction, and something to the harmony of its cadence. When common words were less pleasing to the ear, or less distinct in their significance, I have familiarized the terms of Philosophy, by applying them to popular ideas, but have rarely admitted any word not authorized by former writers; for I believe that whoever knows the English tongue in its present extent, will be able to express his thoughts without further help from other nations." This was a brave stand to take among writers who were skeptical of English as a lasting medium of expression and who followed Bacon by writing in Latin, "the universal language."

Balanced, periodic structure, diction of Latin derivation, and frequent antitheses are features of Johnson's style, which was too ponderous for the subjects then popular in periodical literature. *The Rambler*, which is a book for meditation rather than for pastime, reached a limited audience, perhaps because it requires no little mental effort in the reading. There are in it, however, some lighter touches: the sword of satire gracefully flourished in the essay on Prospero, the familiarity of the paper on Suspirius the Screech Owl, and, above all, the genuine English humor, the elephantine friskiness of the panegyric on "The Advantages of Living in a Garret." "That a garret will make every man a wit, I am very far from supposing; I know there are some who would continue blockheads even on the summit of the Andes, or on the peak of Teneriffe." This lighter touch on less serious themes characterizes the papers which Johnson contributed to *The Adventurer* and *The Idler*; and these essays should appeal to those who will not read Boswell to learn of the tender heart hidden in the huge, repulsive body, who take as final condemnation Goldsmith's reproach, "Doctor Johnson, if you were to make little fishes talk, they would talk like whales." The lover of magnificent prose will admire Johnson because in him classic prose attained perfection, because there is the soul-shaking grandeur of a deep-voiced organ in the sonorous roll of his solemn and majestic periods. Truly his prayer, "O God, who bringest honest labour to good effect, look with mercy upon my studies and endeavours," seems to have been answered.

Edmund Burke (1729–1797)

If the almost antithetical epithets "prose Poet Laureate of Whiggery" and "guardian angel to the English nation" are both applicable to Burke, then he is indeed that rare anomaly, a short-visioned party man who is also a farsighted statesman. Edmund Burke, perhaps oftener than any other historical figure, has been hanged, drawn, quartered, and buried as entirely dead; yet, somehow, he lives. The latest slaughter and interment occurs in a book by G. R. Stirling Taylor, *Modern English Statesmen*, which accomplishes a decidedly drastic revaluation of its subjects. We cull a few gems from the chapter on Burke: "He ended as he began: a firm believer in the privileges of the governing set and a humble worship under their throne." "A man must live, of course; and Burke seems mainly to have lived by payments for his political services." "In this great moment of his public life [trial of Hastings] Burke did not ring true." "Tested by the standards of philosophy and measured by the rods of universal history, Burke's criticism of the [French] Revolution was little but the ravings of a sick man in delirium." Concerning his devotion to Marie Antoinette, "It is true that there may be few things so worth weeping for as a pretty face; but one must really distinguish between melodrama and sociology." And so on, ad infinitum!

Those of us who had the good fortune to study American history under a patriotic teacher, and were taught that though, for example, France came to our aid during our Revolutionary War with the occult intention of

warring against her dearest enemy rather than with an altogether altruistic motive, we yet must not look a gift horse in the mouth, feel that these everlasting aspersions on Burke are in criminally bad taste. Granting that Burke, being English in his ideals, had English trade interests at heart, and granting that he was also an English politician, shall we therefore perforce dismiss as utter hocus-pocus such sentences as these? "The question with me is, not whether you have a right to render your people miserable, but whether it is not your interest to make them happy. It is not what a lawyer tells me I *may* do, but what humanity, reason, and justice tell me I ought to do." It is historical that England has ever had her own trade interests at heart in governing her colonies, and we cannot consider Burke insincere because he appealed to these interests in trying to save the American situation. There seems to be sincerity as well as irony in this passage: "The temper and character which prevail in our colonies are, I am afraid, unalterable by any human art. We cannot, I fear, falsify the pedigree of this fierce people, and persuade them that they are not sprung from a nation in whose veins the blood of freedom circulates. The language in which they would hear you tell them this tale would detect the imposition; your speech would betray you. An Englishman is the unfittest person on earth to argue another Englishman into slavery." Somehow we feel that the struggling colonies, grasping for friendly straws, welcomed Burke's appeal. Perhaps, though, one could say of this, that "our intellect is at the mercy of our emotions." Be that as it may, it is certain

that Burke's emotions were very much at the mercy of his imagination and that his imagination was unbridled.

In *Aristocracy and Justice* Paul Elmer More—that confirmed aristocrat—writes: "It is perfectly easy for a keen and narrow intelligence to ridicule Burke's trust in the imagination, but as a matter of fact there is nothing more practical than a clear recognition of its vast domain in human affairs—it was Napoleon Bonaparte who said that 'imagination rules the world.' Burke is not dead; his pages are an inexhaustible storehouse of inspiration and wisdom." And despite every post-mortem and burial we can but reiterate with More, "Burke is not dead." Edmund Burke stands for certain old English ideals,—foremost among them the sacred rights of the powers that be and the no less sacred rights of the powers that own property,—and no Englishman, even in the face of England's achieved democracy, claims that these ideals are dead. If, then, Burke hurled awful diatribes and vituperations against the French revolutionists, shall we not say that this stupidity, madness, or whatever one may call it—why not farseeing patriotism?—was due simply to the possession of these English ideals by a man of a volcanic Irish nature. Burke's fervid imagination saw in the revolutionists a future menace to English monarchy and English property. Perhaps he was an alarmist, and perhaps he misunderstood the trend of the times; yet we wonder what would be his reaction to socialism as evidenced in Russia, in Germany, in England, in fact everywhere. Doubtless he would at least exclaim violently that the passions of intemperate men forge their fetters.

A master of oratorical style and manner and easily to the fore among English declamatory writers, Burke is nevertheless a disappointment to the purely literary student. His prose is like brocaded damask, suitable for public occasions, but too inflexible for friendly gatherings; it crackles in its stiff perfection, but creates no silky, soft-voiced rustlings. At times the poet takes the place of the orator, however, as when he writes of the death of his only son. "The storm has gone over me; and I lie like one of those old oaks which the late hurricane has scattered about me. I am stripped of all my honours; I am torn up by the roots, and lie prostrate on the earth. . . . I am alone. I have none to meet my enemies at the gate. . . . I live in an inverted order. They who ought to have succeeded me are gone before me." Sad indeed were the last years of this statesman who, according to E. L. Godkin, has "inspired or suggested nearly all the juridical changes which distinguish the England of today from the England of the last century."

The terror of Burke in the face of the French revolutionists, for terror it was, was his reaction to the astonishment at the gigantic upheaval of a nation like his own. He describes his state of mind in the essay on "The Sublime and Beautiful." "Astonishment is that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. . . . It anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force." Of course

we, who are so accustomed to national revolutions that we give them second place in our newspapers and assign the large headlines to the smaller revolutions of the divorce court, cannot quite comprehend the fear which gripped the mind of Burke in those good old days of staid governments and happy marriages.

The Vindication of Natural Society, another of Burke's earlier works, is "a piece of polemic by parody." It is clever in his fiercely zealous but careful manner, a manner which caused Matthew Arnold to pronounce his "Asiatic" prose the greatest prose in English. The earliest master of the paragraph, Burke, even in this attempt to parody both the manner and the matter of Lord Bolingbroke, is in the glow and sweep of his style everlastingly and gloriously himself.

Walter Savage Landor (1775–1864)

In his imitation of the ancient classic authors Landor is an example of nineteenth-century reaction against romanticism. His troubled life, which began at Warwick and which was passed in perpetual lawsuits, ended in a King Lear tragedy. A gentleman by birth, by association, and by education, Landor unfortunately allowed himself to be governed by a temper which he described as "the worst beyond comparison that man was ever cursed with" and which was constantly getting him into difficulties.

Landor's severely classic style, which is characterized by force of expression and happy imagery and which carries gracefully a weight of paradox, and his clear,

penetrating thought have given him a secure place among English prose writers. The book *Imaginary Conversations* carries one to the top of a mountain from which he may view the panorama of the ages unfolding before him, and its six volumes acquaint the reader with many interesting characters from various times and places of the world. Landor is at times very modern in his use of climactic endings, as is shown in the closing sentences of a dedicatory epistle to Pope Pius IX. "One honest man, one wise man, one peaceful man, commands a hundred millions, without a baton and without a charger. He wants no fortress to protect him; he stands higher than any citadel can raise him, brightly conspicuous to the most distant nations, God's servant by election, God's image by beneficence." Yet as a rule one must be leisurely in reading Landor and must not demand haste toward a high point of interest. Stern of mold and massive in energy, Landor has, withal, a certain shy, exquisite tenderness. He says great things greatly. He loves all humanity, save kings, and he writes thus understandingly of deep love, "No voice shakes its surface: the muses themselves approach it with a tardy and a timid step, and with a low and tremulous and melancholy song."

Landor is, perhaps, the last author who can be called a classicist in the strict use of the term; but the classicism which means the perfection of form that results from literary architecture can be found in all writings deserving the name of forceful prose.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

One who is interested sufficiently to go further into the real classicism of the Greeks and has not time to read Greek literature for himself will find the studies of J. P. Mahaffy, E. P. Coleridge, R. G. Moulton, and E. H. Plumptre helpful. In *A Study of the Drama* Brander Matthews has a brief but illuminating account of the theories of classicism promulgated by the Italian and French critics of the Renaissance period. John Steinfort Kedney has given a clear and critical exposition of the Hegelian theory in a book under the title *Hegel's Æsthetics*. In his *History of English Literature*, Vol. I, Taine has an original discussion of the classic movement in Europe. Professor C. H. Herford, in his *Introduction*, gives us a fine essay on Sir Thomas Browne and his writings.

CHAPTER V

THE LETTER ESSAY

Sunt enim, qui, quod sentiunt, etsi optimum sit, tamen invidiae metu non audent dicere.—CICERO

BACKGROUND

The formal epistle, or letter essay, has been a recognized literary form since the great days of classical antiquity, when its never-equaled master, Cicero, perfected the style of Latin prose. While of tremendous importance to ecclesiastical history and of unquestionable value to literature in general, the epistles of apostolic times and the letters of succeeding popes and bishops on down the years are not only too dogmatic, sermonic, or denunciatory in character to be classed under the letter essay of the literary kind which we are here considering, but they lack especially the chief characteristic of this literary form, its pretended privacy. In the days when the letter essay began to appear, everyone knew—though no one had the indelicacy to voice his knowledge—that it was simply a new dress for an age-old vice. When the Tudors were in power in England libel was given a very liberal interpretation, and consequently the literary gossip-mongers, suffering from the practical application of the stern adage "Words fly, but writings remain," were "hard

put to it" in their chief pastime. Of course a private letter to a friend did not fall under the ban of the law, and should that friend be unwise and unworthy enough to publish the private letter, the writer could be becomingly shocked and grieved by this cruel betrayal of his confidence. Even more; since he was not writing to the public he could not—and this was the all-important thing—be held responsible for the disclosures or positive calumnies in his letter.

Shortly after Francis Bacon published his aphoristic essays, Bishop Hall, known to us as a character writer, began to publish letter essays which masqueraded as genuine private epistles to friends. But the unmistakable stamp of their true nature is upon them. Bishop Hall never wrote with the freedom of friend to friend; he was ever watchful of the critical public. Enamored of the didactic purple of Baconian tradition and honestly impressed with his own pastoral mission, the bishop wished to instruct, and instruct he did—not with the easy, sympathetic personalities of friendship, but as if he were in very truth speaking ex cathedra. "We can best teach others by ourselves," he writes; "let me tell your lordship, how I would pass my days, whether common or sacred, that you (or whatsoever others, overhearing me), may either approve my thriftiness, or correct my errors. . . . All days are His, who gave time a beginning and continuance. . . . How miserable is the condition of those men, which spend the time as if it were given them, and not lent; as if hours were waste creatures, and such as should never be accounted for; as if God would take this for a good bill of reckon-

ing: *Item*—spent upon my pleasures, forty years!" Though this unmistakable sermonic tinge pervades the letter essays of Hall, there are in them, in contrast to his earlier, satiric writings, a mellowness, a spirit of fatherly interest, a wider and a more tolerant understanding of human nature as possessing virtues no less than vices. Contemporary with the scholarly old bishop was James Howell, a letter writer who alleged, as did Hall, that his essays were really the product of private correspondence. But this pretense of privacy soon ceased to be maintained. The later letter essayists, though they kept the letter form, tacitly acknowledged the fact, so well understood by their readers, that they were simply making use of a new literary device for the publication of their ideas. To understand how their evasion of the strict laws concerning libel came to be tolerated it will be necessary to glance into the early history of journalism.

The Essay and Journalism

The eighteenth century was the silver age of periodical literature, just as the present is its golden age. The origin of periodical essays, which being usually of a political nature and written for purposes of the moment bore the earmarks of journalism, is to be attributed to Daniel Defoe. But it was Steele and Addison who, by giving the periodical essay literary significance, changed this ephemeral weed in the field of literature into a perennial plant. Since the early history of the letter essay is the history of journalism, and since jour-

nalism began with the news-letter, it will be of interest to trace the origin and development of this news-letter.

The *Acta Diurna*, or accounts of the imperial armies of Rome, were sent out to the provinces, and thus the original newspaper came into being. The earliest record of the news sheet in modern history is concerning small circulars issued in Germany, but the first real newspaper, the official *Notizie Scritte*, was established in Venice in 1566 by order of the government. In France the father of Montaigne caused news offices to be set up where wants could be advertised, and soon there was a regular system of advertisement. In England under James I news pamphlets, called *News from Italy, News from France, News from Netherlands,* and other places, were published. In 1622 the first regular issue of weekly news was established by Nathaniel Butter. During the next few years there came into being, in addition to these weekly pamphlets, news-letters of professional correspondents hired by country squires. "In the capital," Macaulay tells us, "the coffee-houses supplied in some measure the place of a journal. Thither the Londoners flocked, as the Athenians of old flocked to the market-place, to learn whether there was any news. . . . But people who lived at a distance from the great theatre of political contention could be kept regularly informed of what was passing there only by means of news-letters. To prepare such letters became a calling in London. . . . The news-writer rambled from coffee-room to coffee-room, collecting reports, squeezed himself into the Sessions-House at old Bailey if there was an interesting trial, nay, perhaps, obtained admission to the

gallery of Whitehall, and noticed how the King and Duke looked. In this way he gathered materials for weekly epistles destined to enlighten some country town or some bench of rustic magistrates."

During the civil war under Charles I newspapers were issued two or three times weekly, and the armies carried with them regular printers. There was freedom of the press during the Protectorate, but when monarchy was restored the press was required to be licensed. Then there was newspaper censorship from 1662 to 1695. During this period of strict governmental surveillance the news-letter, pirouetting gayly just beyond the grasping hands of the law, the while she exasperated its stern officials by her saucy grimaces and biting quirks, became the very queen of the literary world—so much a queen that when in sheer despair the government repealed the licensing act, she walked boldly into the printing-office and demanded as her partner in life the then subdued and later henpecked newspaper. Straightway *The Flying Post* and *Dawker's News-Letter* announced that blank space would be left on the news sheet in order that the purchaser might write therein a letter to his country friend. This gave the sender an opportunity to express opinions and criticisms which, if printed, would have been matter for legal prosecution. The first writer of prominence to take advantage of this means for "thinking in public" was Daniel Defoe, and so he may be considered the originator of the modern editorial, which evolved from the news-letter. But as the news-letter developed it branched out into other fields of literature, transforming

itself into essays of the short-story or moral-narrative type, the biographical, the critical, and the familiar. There are only three great writers who produced what may be called letter essays, and even much of their work is but questionably in this form.

Definition

Waiving formality and treating the letter essay as it deserves, we may describe it by personification, as a bold-voiced, altogether too outspoken little actress who, afraid to disseminate gossip from behind the footlights, dons a Quaker garb and walks demurely through the town, stopping in at a friend's home for a harmless call, where, after binding her friend to a secrecy which it is understood may be violated at the first opportunity, she tells her spicy bit of scandal. More formally the letter essay may be defined as a news-letter of literary character, written in the first person, with an address and a date at the beginning and a signature at the end; a letter which, though it is really from a public person writing for publication about some real or fictitious happening, purports to be the product of a friend's leisurely scribbling to his friend about some event interesting to both. There are, as we have noted, only three writers who can be classed strictly as letter essayists, though many masters in other branches of literature have occasionally used this literary form for some transient purpose. Our consideration here will be limited to the writers who may be said to have immortalized the letter essay.

James Howell (1594–1666)

Howell was a man of many affairs, a royalist who, in company with many others, suffered imprisonment during the Protectorate. Of his miscellaneous compositions the only important survivals are his *Epistolae Ho-Elianae*, which were compiled during his imprisonment from his old correspondence and published in four books between 1645 and 1655. Much that Howell relates is probably fiction, yet he writes with the apparent veracity of an eyewitness. There is variety not only in his rather mediocre style, which attracts the reader by its pathos and humor, its easy familiarity, and its rapid narrative; but also in his subject matter, for he was journalist enough to use the devices for securing popularity. Moreover, Howell was clever in his choice of such notable persons as Charles I, Buckingham, and Sir Kenelm Digby as the supposed recipients of his letters. Concerning the murder of Buckingham, he wrote to Lady Scroop, Countess of Sunderland: "I lay yesternight at the Post-House at Stilton, and this morning betimes the Post-Master came to my beds head and told me the Duke of Buckingham was slain: my faith was not then strong enough to believe it, till an hour ago I met in the way with my Lord of Rutland (your brother), riding post towards London, it pleas'd him to alight, and shew me a Letter wherein there was an exact relation of all the circumstances of this sad Tragedy." The vivid and gruesome details which follow are enhanced by an introductory picture of how the duke "did rise up in a well-disposed

humour out of his bed, and cut a Caper or two," in sheer exuberance of the joy of living; while the apologetic acknowledgment at the close, that the author's grief may have impaired the work of his memory, suffices to stamp the whole letter with verisimilitude. With an ability to "lie like the truth" second only to that of Defoe, as is evidenced in all the letters of this irrepressible busybody, with a manner that savors of Steele, Howell is a truly convincing and rather charming epistolary newsmonger.

Daniel Defoe (1661–1731)

The writer of the first English novel was also a pioneer in journalism. Defoe's was a troublous life, and about it hovered a glamour of romance which colored all his thoughts. "I have gone through a life of wonders. . . . In the school of affliction I have learnt more philosophy than at the academy. . . . In prison I have learnt to know that liberty does not consist in open doors, and the free egress and regress of locomotion." In view of Minto's characterization of Defoe as "a great, a truly great liar, perhaps the greatest liar that ever lived," and of Lee's opinion that this busy journalist was "the most truly consistent of English authors," —a quotation which, in accordance with its context, might be written "the most consistently truthful of English authors,"—this extract from Defoe is enlightening: "He that opposes his own judgment against the current of the times ought to be backed with unanswerable truth; and he that has truth on his side, is a fool

as well as a coward, if he is afraid to own it, because of the multitude of other men's opinions. 'Tis hard for a man to say, all the world is mistaken, but himself. But if it be so, who can help it?" Whether Defoe believed that he was backed with unanswerable truth may be inferred from the facts that he was caricatured, robbed, fined, imprisoned, and set in the pillory—all because of his writing what was "against the current of the times."

Defoe's *Review of the Affairs of France* was a real literary achievement, being a paper which appeared twice or thrice weekly for nine years. It contained a department called the "Mercure Scandale; or Advice from the Scandalous Club" made up of literary essays, which section was finally separated from the *Review* itself and called the *Little Review*. Defoe contributed also to *Mist's Journal*, *Applebee's Journal*, and other periodicals, and his biographer, Lee, collected and published two volumes of miscellaneous writings.

A journalist above all, Defoe necessarily produced much ephemeral work. Yet there is true grain among the chaff, as is shown by his masterpiece, the essay on "The Instability of Human Greatness." Though it be an occasional bit of writing suggested by the funeral of the Duke of Marlborough, this essay may be considered as the bitter fruit of his own life. Defoe was a social outcast. Without friend or patron, with enemies political and religious, ever in fear of prison, he went bravely on, high-spirited and unashamed. "What then is the work of life? . . . Is it to grow great in the mouth of fame and take up many pages in history?

Alas! that is no more than making a tale for the reading of posterity. . . . Is it to furnish subject to the poets? . . . That is, in short, no more than to be hereafter turn'd into ballad and song. . . . Or is their business rather to add virtue and piety to their glory, which alone will pass them into eternity and make them truly immortal? What is glory without virtue? A great man without religion is no more than a great beast without a soul. What is honour without merit? And what can be call'd true merit, but that which makes a person be a good man, as well as a great man?" This essay and *Robinson Crusoe* would be sufficient to secure Defoe a place in English literature though he now, with countless others, must "lie in oblivion, and under the ruins of the earth, undistinguished from one another, nay, even from the common earth." Despite the many evils which befell him, Defoe retained his ideals. In the essay "The Education of Women" he makes us aware of the fact that he never lost his high reverence for womanhood. "A woman of sense and manners," he writes, "is the finest and most delicate part of God's creation, the glory of her Maker, and the great instance of His singular regard to man, his darling creature: to whom He gave the best gift either God could bestow or man receive."

If style is the man, then the style of Defoe may partly clear the question concerning his truthfulness. "Let not those gentlemen," he tells us, "who are critics in style, in method, or manner, be angry, that I have never pulled off my cap to them, in humble excuse for my loose way of treating the world as to language, expres-

sion, and politeness of phrase. . . . When I am busied writing essays and matters of science, I shall address them for their aid, and take as much care to avoid their displeasure as becomes me; but when I am upon the subject of trade and the variety of casual story, I think myself a little loose from the bonds of cadence and perfections of style, and satisfy myself in my study to be explicit, easy, free, and very plain." In the technical sense Defoe had, when writing narrative, no style; there is in his story no consciously produced effect. Arrangement forgotten in the desire to put down crowding facts; negligence, repetitions, wordiness; details so dull that they could never have been invented; art so obviously lacking that it becomes the profoundest art, art that is truth itself,—this is the style of the most truly consistent of English authors!

Jonathan Swift (1667–1745)

Swift is an enigma, a Promethean giant whose *saeva indignatio* fed upon his heart till he shouted forth thunderous anathemas against the wrongs of mankind, against the "peine forte et dure of this Liliputian-Yahoo flesh," against human "blindness to the horrors of this muddy vesture of mortality." Swift has given us some of the most repulsive of all literature; he has hurled poisoned arrows with his giant hand; he is the most dreadful example of what "indignation and grim-eyed defiance" can do to a mind too great to find adequate outlet.

Dean Swift was born of English parents in Dublin, and was educated at Kilkenny School and Dublin Uni-

versity, where, though he detested the studies and despised the instructors, he received a degree. He then became private secretary to his relative Sir William Temple, who was at the time engaged in a literary controversy which provoked Swift into writing that keen satire *The Battle of the Books*. After some years Swift became an Anglican minister and was stationed at Laracor, Ireland, where, though he hated the place, he labored faithfully to help the people. While there he wrote *A Tale of a Tub*, which not only brought the recognition he craved but also gave the real Swift to the world. This satire, inspired by the very genius of insult, assembling all his passions, yet cool and logical in its reasoning, pitiless in its sarcasm, incisive in its irony, nevertheless awakens in us a horror of a madman who sobs while he is laughing and mocking at himself. "Even I myself, the author of these momentous truths, am a person whose imaginations are hard-mouthed, and exceedingly disposed to run away with his reason, which I have observed, from long experience, to be a very light rider, and easily shaken off; upon which account my friends will never trust me alone, without a solemn promise to vent my speculations in this, or the like manner, for the universal benefit of human kind." Having by this satire come into public notice, Swift left his church work to enter politics, and through pamphlet writing soon became one of the most important persons in London. There rival political parties battled for his support with courtly flattery. His insufferable arrogance at this time is shown in his letter to the Duchess of Queensbury: "I am glad you know your duty; for it

has been a known and established rule above twenty years in England that the first advances have been constantly made by all ladies who aspired to my acquaintance, and the greater their quality the greater were their advances." This from the man who dashed off pamphlets which he scorned to revise and refused to sign, the while he laughed at those he served. "Upon my arrival here," Swift wrote to Archbishop King, "I found myself equally caressed by both parties; by one as a sort of bough for drowning men to lay hold of; and by the other as one discontented with the late men in power for not being thorough in their designs, and therefore ready to approve present things." Sensitive to the last degree, he yet would cut and tear the hearts of all who were unhappy enough to encounter him.

At this time Swift tried unsuccessfully to obtain a bishopric in England. Disappointed by his failure, which was doubtless due to his fearful satire on religion, *A Tale of a Tub*, he was forced to be satisfied with the position of dean of Saint Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. While there he wrote his famous *Gulliver's Travels*, the most terrific satire ever written; indeed, we might almost say, the last word in blasphemy against humanity. In some happy interval of sanity during the madness of his tragic last years, he bequeathed his property to found an asylum. Possessed of a most violent temper, hating resignation, loving to outrage and to destroy, he wrote of his misery to Lord Bolingbroke in Dublin: "I find myself disposed every year, or rather every month, to be more angry and revengeful; and my rage is so ignoble, that it descends even to resent the folly and

baseness of the enslaved people among whom I live." Swift endured the horror of anticipating insanity, knowing that he must like a blasted tree "die first at the top."

Though Swift writes with the deliberate incisiveness of a surgeon and the cold gravity of a judge, he fails to be truly literary in that he addresses only particular truths to a certain few with the desire for present success, rather than general truths to all with the desire for immortality by the embodiment of eternal beauty. He is one of the most original writers and a master of prose, but his work is not wholesome reading, because it is, as a whole, a ferocious, monstrous satire on humanity, a rending of the veil which modesty would hang before ugly uncleanness. Yet there is another Swift, whose *Journal to Stella* shows him in his rare moments of tenderness; whose *Drapier's Letters* halted the English politicians and brought temporary relief to the suffering Irish; whose *Bickerstaff Almanac* inspired Steele to create his delightful character Isaac Bickerstaff; and finally, whose *Meditations upon a Broomstick* and *A Scheme to Make a Hospital for Incurables* give him an abiding place among the periodical essayists. The letter *To a Very Young Lady on Her Marriage* contains some wholesome advice, though it is spoiled by the bitterness and coarseness so much a part of Swift, whose attitude toward woman in this letter makes us wonder whether he could have loved and respected his mother. "I never yet knew a tolerable woman to be fond of her own sex. . . . Your sex employ more thought, memory, and application to be fools than would serve to make them wise and useful. . . . When I reflect on this I cannot con-

ceive you to be human creatures, but a sort of species hardly a degree above a monkey; who has more diverting tricks than any of you, is an animal less mischievous and expensive, might in time be a tolerable critic in velvet and brocade, and, for aught I know, would equally become them." Surely this is the essence of brutality. What a piteous spectacle is this intellectual giant shackled prone in the mire of hate, disgust, and mental filth—he who should have looked with the eyes of his genius into the face of the sun as he trod the mountain tops in the high clear air of the spirit!

CHAPTER VI

THE SHORT-STORY ESSAY

I do not write a novel because I am terribly afraid I should show up all my friends.—HOLMES

BACKGROUND

To say that a cup of coffee may give direction to the destiny of a nation is, perhaps, to put an unwarranted strain upon the credulity of the normal person; yet there is no doubt that the clubs and the coffeehouses of the early eighteenth century were the most important factors not only in English social life but in the promulgation of the democratic ideal in her political life as well. Men's words and manners naturally improved as they came together in the intimacy of these convivial meeting-places. Above all must be attributed to the coffeehouses the miraculous creation of a new ideal in the English mind, despite its long-established immunity to new ideals. Though political freedom had been attained and there was a rather well-developed system of public instruction in matters of government, the nation, Niobe-like, still wore its widow's weeds and sighed for the dear dead days of royalty. In the clubs and the coffeehouses was engendered the spirit which through the medium of literature was to make real citizens of the English people. With these gathering-places as inspira-

tion and as patron, political, social, and religious literature was published broadcast throughout England. Daily newspapers helped to spread the rapidly growing national spirit. It was an age when party interests were very strong and when great writers employed satiric prose as a means to further party ends. In one way it was, however, a dangerous age in which to write, because any freedom with the reputation of one's neighbor brought a writer into unpleasant conflict with severe and far-reaching libel laws. As a result the literary gossiper avoided untimely extinction by the simple expedient of inventing a fictitious narrative with rather obvious moral application to certain existing conditions and with characters which were in everything but name impersonations of the author's dearest enemies. For his own safety the essayist relied on the supposition that though a man must claim the shoe which fits him, he may prefer to take it surreptitiously and to put it on in the privacy of his own room.

In conditions such as these Sir William Temple (1628–1699) discovered the germ of the short-story essay and in "Health and Long Life" brought it to the attention of the reading public. His laudable aim was, as he tells us, "to give men the occasion to consider more than they do." But it was Daniel Defoe who popularized the new form by his gossipy yet refreshing style, his decided interest in life, his determined point of view, his clear-sighted though vulgar realism, his bravery in the face of repeated social snubs, and his sympathetic knowledge of his fellow men, influential or humble.

Definition

The short story, as linked up with the eighteenth-century essay, is not the modern story perfected by Poe, but is a delightfully unconventional little creature, happily ignorant of all restraining rules. Coming into view apparently from nowhere it ambles gracefully along, chuckling to itself as it relates to a chance companion a moral narrative, a tale without a plot, a tale permitting endless digressions, fanciful illustrations, and comments; then, with a sly wink and perhaps a judicial thumb turned down, it suddenly disappears, leaving its comrade with the feeling that he has just heard some particularly spicy gossip. The personality of the writer is always in evidence, and in its limitations of time, place, and knowledge the short-story essay is very like the story told in the first person. The modern short story even when told in the first person takes strictest care to eliminate everything not vital to the development of the plot and the characters—if its limited action permits the characters to develop. The short-story essay, on the contrary, is a spineless creature, sans plot, sans character, sans everything that makes the story of today, save narrative, which is made for carrying-power rather than for speed. This inimitable literary form, which piques one's descriptive expression into a riot of metaphors, was to the eighteenth-century writer what the faithful Modestine was to Stevenson, a little pack mule on which his genius rode to fame. To the short-story essay we owe our most intimate acquaintance with gallant "Dick" Steele, with

courteous, genial Addison, with lovable Goldsmith, and with the dear creator of our own immortal Rip and Ichabod.

Sir Richard Steele (1672–1729)

Steele was a high-hearted, lovable Irishman, whose unselfish, life-long though apparently broken friendship with Addison is one of the glories in the history of literature. His studies at Oxford, his duties as soldier, poet, playwright, essayist, member of Parliament, and publisher of a newspaper, all rested lightly upon his sturdy shoulders. Steele loved children and respected women, and it is doubtless in consequence that he endeavored successfully in his writings to make vice ridiculous and virtue appealing. His generous heart brought into being Sir Roger de Coverley and the other attractive characters of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator,* though he gave them over to the pen of the humorous and polished Addison that they might know immortality. *The Tatler* was a small folio sheet appearing three times a week, which modestly announced its general purpose, "To expose the false arts of life, to pull off the disguises of cunning, vanity, and affectation, and to recommend a general simplicity in our dress, our discourse, and our behavior." In explanation of his already familiar pseudonym, Isaac Bickerstaff, Steele says: "The general purpose of the whole has been to recommend truth, innocence, honour, and virtue, as the chief ornaments of life; but I considered, that severity of manners was absolutely necessary to him who would censure others, and for *that reason, and that only,* chose

to talk in a mask. I shall not carry my humility so far as to call myself a vicious man, but at the same time must confess, my life is at best but pardonable. And, with no greater character than this, a man would make but an indifferent progress in attacking prevailing and fashionable vices, which Mr. Bickerstaff has done with a freedom of spirit, that would have lost both its beauty and efficacy, had it been pretended to by Mr. Steele." Addison soon joined forces with his friend and helped to make *The Tatler* still more popular. This periodical was discontinued after the two hundred and seventy-first issue, possibly for the reason given by Steele in the final paper, "This work indeed has for some time been disagreeable to me, and the purpose of it wholly lost by my being so long understood as the author," but more probably because the editors wished to publish in its stead the daily *Spectator*. The courtly figures of Sir Roger, Will Honeycomb, and the Spectator give the essays a unity which those of *The Tatler* lack. *The Spectator* comes very, very close to being a novel, and we are not surprised at the appearance of Goldsmith's novel of character the *Vicar of Wakefield* within the same generation.

Steele's style is, as Thackeray claims, like his life, "full of faults and careless blunders; and redeemed, like that, by his sweet and compassionate nature." He is continually giving us fascinating bits of autobiography; and his sincerity, his clear convincing tone, make us feel that we know the man when we read what he has written, that he has not tried to wrap about himself a robe of mystery.

Joseph Addison (1672–1719)

An influential man was Addison, and a past master in the pleasant art of living with others. As Macaulay observes, "So effectually did he retort on vice the mockery which had recently been directed against virtue, that since his time an open violation of decency has always been considered amongst us a sure mark of a fool." What an achievement for the days that followed the Restoration, when in very truth vice came forth from secret places to strut in gaudy raiment through the streets and to add her guilty tongue to the ribald clamor of the drawing-room! Even the Church, with her influence among the people as a whole demoralized by the Reformation, could not have brought about this remarkable result.

Addison, born in Milston, Wiltshire, achieved an enviable reputation for manliness and scholarship at Charterhouse School and at Oxford, and then entered political life, only to make friends everywhere by his tact and easy grace of manner. To him is due the honor of establishing the school of literary criticism, but our interest here is confined to his work as a short-story essayist. His desire was to teach men the art of decent, kindly living, and to that end he endeavored to make vice despicable and virtue attractive. He made morality fashionable, and it remained in fashion. "Reprehending those vices which are too trivial for the chastisement of the law, and too fantastical for the cognizance of the pulpit,"—though the pulpit is a better adversary of evil and is more worldly-wise than Addison admits,

—*The Tatler* and *The Spectator* had, in the words of Doctor Johnson, "a perceptible influence upon the conversation of that time, and taught the frolic and the gay to unite merriment with decency." Nor was this but a momentary conquest; it was the queening of virtue in the heart of the English people. The essays of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* give us characters who realize Addison's ideals, and who will live forever; they also give us intimate pictures of social life in the England of that time, and they aided the development of literary criticism.

Always genuine and sincere, though not to be considered profound, Addison writes from his heart in a style familiar yet elegant. Of kindness he says: "There is no society or conversation to be kept up in the world without good-nature, or something which must bear its appearance and supply its place. For this reason mankind have been forced to invent a kind of artificial humanity, which is what we express by the word good-breeding. . . . Good-nature is generally born with us; health, prosperity, and kind treatment from the world, are great cherishers of it where they find it. . . . The greatest wits I have conversed with are men eminent for their humanity." This essay is the unveiling of Addison himself, who enjoyed, as Thackeray tells us, "a life prosperous and beautiful, a calm death; an immense fame and affection afterwards for his happy and spotless name."

Addison knew the devices of literary style as he knew other external forms. He could use exact words to express fine shades of thought. Cleverly turned

phrases, harmonies of words, life-giving variety, classic care directing the clear streams of thought, inventions, images, figures of speech,—all these are in his writings. Yet there is created in the reader a slight weariness because the author was always thinking of sound, always careful lest passion carry him away. Who could shed tears over the plight of a heroine, for example, when he is advised of it in such periodic fashion as this? "Constantia, who knew that nothing but the report of her marriage could have driven him to such extremities, was not to be comforted; she now accused herself for having so tamely given an ear to the proposal of a husband, and looked upon the new lover as the murderer of Theodosius; in short, she resolved to suffer the utmost effects of her father's displeasure rather than comply with a marriage which appeared to her so full of guilt and horror." This is the thought and expression of the thoroughbred classicist. Imagine this classic marvel as a heroine of Shakespeare. Classicism is utterly incapable of real emotion and therefore wholly incapable of portraying passion. Despite his fondness for the classic expression, Addison could indulge in occasional characteristic humor. "Æridæus, a beautiful youth of Epirus, in love with Praxinoe, the wife of Thespis, escaped without damage, saving only that two of his fore-teeth were struck out, and his nose a little flattened."

Addison's most notable gift was his fine imaginative power. In the *Vision of Mirza* he tells us: "As I was here airing myself on the tops of the mountain, I fell into a profound contemplation on the vanity of human

life. . . . Whilst I was thus musing, I cast my eyes toward the summit of a rock that was not far from me, where I discovered one in the habit of a shepherd, with a little musical instrument in his hand. As I looked upon him he . . . began to play upon it. The sound of it was exceeding sweet, and wrought into a variety of tunes that . . . put me in mind of those heavenly airs that are played to the departed souls of good men upon their first arrival in Paradise, to wear out the impressions of the last agonies, and qualify them for the pleasure of that happy place. My heart melted away in secret raptures." Endowed with a natural grace and a tender delicacy which rested on him like the personal benediction of the muses; trained to a stately, musical, measured style; inspired by a sincere desire to make the world better by his passing through it on the journey of life, Addison should give us pause in these days of commercialized art when so many greater men than he have prostituted their minds and hearts to evil.

Oliver Goldsmith (1728–1774)

Careless, irresponsible, much-tried, sweet-natured Goldsmith was the son of a poor rector of Kilkenny West, Ireland. The father is well known to us in the rôles of the Man in Black and the Vicar of Wakefield. The surroundings of Goldsmith's early life are described in *The Deserted Village*, for this homely, lovable Irishman is, perhaps, the most autobiographical of writers. After receiving his degree from Trinity College, Dublin, he spent a short time at Edinburgh Uni-

versity, studying medicine, and also at the University of Leyden, before he set out on foot for a tour of Europe. In 1756 he arrived in London, where, after an unsuccessful attempt to follow the profession of medicine, he tried that of teaching with no more success. Then he began to write for *The Monthly Review*, and the next year published his *Chinese Letters* in the *Public Ledger*. Having the good fortune to win the friendship of Doctor Johnson, he became a member of the famous Club. Though Goldsmith published much during his last years, he was so prodigal that he died in great debt, and in consequence was not buried in Westminster Abbey, as have been nearly all the other eminent English writers. Johnson wrote an epitaph in which was this illuminating tribute, the greatest ever paid to any writer, and truly worthy of Goldsmith: *Nullum tetigit quod non ornavit.*

Goldsmith's *Chinese Letters*, consisting of one hundred and twenty-three letters purporting to be from a Chinaman visiting in London, were reprinted as *The Citizen of the World*. Goldsmith had profound political convictions and was farsighted. His equally excellent essays in *The Bee* make us wonder that two of his contemporaries thought of him so lightly as to call him an "inspired idiot" who "wrote like an angel, and talked like poor Poll." It is true that he spoke with difficulty, was slow of tongue and unattractive, that he talked with modern untimeliness and sincerity, yet we must remember that he showed to greater disadvantage because of the artificial, priggish, composed manners of his generation in London. His fellow members of the

club sneered at the gayety which turned all his misfortunes to favor, yet this cheerfulness makes his sweethearted writings a fount of perpetual refreshment. Beau Tibbs, in *The Citizen of the World*, is truly "laughter holding both his sides," buoyant farce, yet farce significant enough to rise to the heights of comedy.

And what shall we say of the style of one who "touched nothing that he did not adorn." Francis Thompson gives the satisfying answer: "The mere technique is that of a master: every sentence deftly shaped, yet easy as the song of a bird; the phrasing unobtrusively perfect, as we have lost the art of perfecting it in our self-conscious age. He had, indeed, the great heritage of eighteenth-century prose, which a succession of masters had shaped to the purposes of wit and humour. But he had lightened it, made it nimble and touched it with an artless-seeming grace, as it never was before. This in the very day when Johnson had compelled English prose to the following of his own deep-draughted movement."

Goldsmith's most remarkable short-story essay, the one telling the Eastern tale of Asem, contains a solution of the problem of evil which anticipates one of the so-called modern theories. Addison's *Vision of Mirza*, though set in the same mystical atmosphere, does not rise to the heights of Asem's journeying. We are not concerned here with the reasoning and illustration which lead to Goldsmith's conclusion: "To be acquainted with vice is not to know virtue. Take me, O my Genius, back to that very world which I have despised: a world which has Allah for its contriver is much more wisely

formed than that which has been projected by Mahomet. Ingratitude, contempt, and hatred, I can now suffer, for perhaps I have deserved them. When I arraigned the wisdom of Providence, I only showed my own ignorance: henceforth let me keep from vice myself, and pity it in others." We prefer to consider the humble and resigned spirit of these lines the flowering of his simple faith in God and trusting love of his fellow men.

This Irishman of boundless pity and of unending cheer, full of tenderness and affection, who awakens pity and love in our hearts, went dauntlessly forward in the face of adversity, armed only with his gift of song. With it he battered down every reserve on the part of strangers, he pierced the most invulnerable heart, he tapped at the portals of the palace and the low door of the poor man's hovel to find them opening for his entrance. "Who," asks Thackeray, "of the millions whom he has amused, does not love him? To be the most loved of English writers, what a title that is for a man!"

Washington Irving (1783–1859)

The first great American writer to regard literature as an end in itself, to write for the sheer joy of writing, was Irving. He was also indubitably the first to teach the skeptical English that the New World not only had unlimited literary material in its romantic natural scenery but also that it could develop masters of style to use the material. Thackeray calls him "the first ambassador whom the New World of letters sent to the Old." Irving was born in New York, then a quaint,

half-fledged town destined to be the setting for his *Salmagundi* papers, which masqueraded as bits of gossip from the clubs and coffeehouses of a real city. Delicate health and aversion to study permitted him but a meager education, though he managed to become a lawyer. He took two trips abroad, and during one of these remained continuously in England for seventeen years. While there he sent *The Sketch Book* to America for publication, and his career as a writer was definitely begun. *Bracebridge Hall* and *Tales of a Traveller* are also due to his sojourn in England. In 1826 he went to Madrid, and during his three years there engaged in study at the Jesuit College of St. Isidoro, in which scholastic atmosphere he was inspired to write within a short time the *Life and Voyages of Columbus*, *The Conquest of Granada*, *Spanish Voyages of Discovery*, and *The Alhambra*. This inspiration led to further study of Spanish history and resulted later in his *Moorish Chronicles*, *Legends of the Conquest of Spain*, *The Lives of Mahomet and his Successors*,—a truly notable achievement of an author who had already discovered the romantic possibilities of America. After serving two years in London as Secretary of the American Legation, he returned to New York to find it grown into a city. Attracted by the Westward movement he journeyed with it, and did much to bring the West into literature by his *Tour on the Prairies*, *Astoria*, and *Adventures of Captain Bonneville*. Irving's last years were spent in peaceful retirement at Tarrytown, where he wrote sketches called *Chronicles of Wolfert's Roost* and biographies of Goldsmith and Washington.

Because of the volume and variety of his work it is difficult to classify Irving as a writer, but a considerable portion of his production may be classed as short-story essays. His career as an essayist was initiated by the *Salmagundi* papers, a periodical of twenty numbers which announced its purpose "simply to instruct the young, reform the old, correct the town and castigate the age." "This," Irving says further, "is an arduous task, and therefore we undertake it with confidence." This audacious and ephemeral adventure was but the feeble forerunner of Irving's *Knickerbocker*, the hero of which was introduced to the public in red-letter fashion, under the alluring title "Distressing," which was explained in this brief but attention-compelling paragraph: "Left his lodgings some time since, and has not since been heard of, a small elderly gentleman, dressed in an old black coat and cocked hat, by the name of *Knickerbocker*. As there are some reasons for believing he is not entirely in his right mind, and as great anxiety is entertained about him, any information concerning him left either at the Columbian Hotel, Mulberry Street, or at the office of this paper, will be *thankfully* received."

After other advertising, announcement was made to this effect: "Nothing satisfactory has been heard of the old gentleman since; but a *very curious kind of a written book* has been found in his room, in his own handwriting. Now I wish you to notice him, if he is still alive, that if he does not return and pay off his bill for board and lodging, I shall have to dispose of his book to satisfy me for the same." Of course the old

gentleman did not return, and the most stupendous hoax in literature was foisted on the reading public. Its style and spirit are inimitable. "One thing, however, appears certain from the unanimous authority of the before quoted philosophers, supported by the evidence of our own senses (which, though very apt to deceive us, may be cautiously admitted as additional testimony)—it appears, I say—and I make the assertion deliberately, without fear of contradiction—that this globe *was created*, and that it is composed of *land and water*. It further appears that it is curiously divided and parcelled out into continents and islands, among which I boldly declare the renowned *Island of New York* will be found by any one who seeks for it in its proper place." This so-called history is a huge burlesque, which, despite its occasional tiresomeness and bad taste, has made its Dutch heroes immortal.

Irving's *Sketch Book* is known to everyone, and has been classified so many times that one more classification will not be presumptuous. If then we coax our childhood friends Rip and Ichabod into this chapter on the short-story essay, who shall censure us? And if mere preference be not sufficient reason for classing Irving among the essayists of this entrancing literary type—which almost disputes first honors with the familiar essay—there is unquestionable reason in the fact that his style is very like those of Addison and Goldsmith in its ease and transparent delicacy, its alluring narrative, and its effective character portraiture. Irving differs from these masters, however, in his purpose, which was rather to please than to reform.

Stephen Leacock (1869–)

The "champion funny man" of contemporary literature may be said to have brought back to life the short-story essay of the early eighteenth century. Not that Professor Leacock hesitates to name his dearest enemy in these days, when caricature has become well-nigh the greatest of the arts, nor that he is antiquated in style and diction,—he is the last word on American "as she is spoke,"—but there are in his writings the inimitable spirit, the debonair cynicism, the half-arrogant courtliness, and, above all, the chuckling, irresponsible story-ette which made the alluring essays of "Dick" Steele and his writer-friends. When Professor Leacock is not "writing down his impressions at twenty-four cents a word" for the current magazines he beguiles away the time in teaching political economy at McGill University. Ever since we learned that McGill far excels as a university old Oxford, where the students are "smoked at for four years" and then sent out to conquer the world, we have been consumed by the desire to continue our education under the professors at Montreal's university. We feel sure that Irish history, for example, would gain new interest when taught by a man who so naïvely explains the London fog as the Gulf Stream which, when nearing Ireland, goes up in the air and comes down in soup on England.

While we do not expect Leacock to be serious, we are gratified to find a mine of wisdom inimitably opened to us in books such as *Essays and Literary Studies* and *The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice*. Ridiculous as they

are, his *Frenzied Fiction* and his *Nonsense Novels* can but help to establish saner standards in fiction; and the way in which he exposes the devices in some of the best sellers is truly refreshing. There is no surer death for the pompous disciple of the melodramatic than laughter, laughter such as is evoked by the mock-melodramatic of the *Nonsense Novels*. As for *Behind the Beyond*, *Sunshine Sketches*, *Moonbeams from the Larger Lunacy*, *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich*, and *Further Foolishness*, what can one say but read and laugh, for these books are all that their titles connote. Professor Leacock speaks with beautiful assurance on any topic, assurance doubly convincing because of the foundations upon which it rests. In his essay "The Decline of the Drama" he tells us, for example, "When I talk of acting and of the spirit of the Drama, I speak of what I know." What is the foundation of this knowledge? "I have acted in Shakespeare as a citizen . . . as 'A Voice Speaks from Within' . . . or a 'Bell Rings from Behind.' . . . I played as A Noise for seven nights. . . . I have been a Groan and a Sigh and a Tumult." He "doth protest too much, methinks." But has he not perfectly characterized the drama of, say Maeterlinck, in these sentences? "The trouble with it is that it is becoming a mere mass of conversation and reflection: nothing happens in it; the action is all going out of it and there is nothing left but thought. When actors begin to think, it is time for a change. They are not fitted for it." Shakespeare used the soliloquy, it is true, but only as a breathing space between two scenes breathless in intensity of action.

If we look for formal literary criticism, the works of Stephen Leacock will disappoint us; but if we look for the wisdom of the king's jester in his illuminating comments and his ridiculous parodies, we shall find it. Ridicule is a fear-inspiring weapon, yet it is really safe for the use of only those who wear the jester's cap and bells; otherwise it is liable to act as a boomerang. What doctor could resent this voicing of a debt to science? "Just think of it. A hundred years ago there were no bacilli, no ptomaine poisoning, no diphtheria, and no appendicitis. Rabies was but little known, and only imperfectly developed. All of these we owe to medical science." So, too, the poor writer, the child of whose brain is being held up to the laughter of the world, is utterly unable to take offense, much less to show that he has taken it.

As all things literary seem to begin and to end somehow with Shakespeare, we rather expected to find a chapter on the English bard in *Literary Lapses*. We were not disappointed. Colonel Hogshead is a perfect representative of those critics who tear the beautiful text of Shakespeare to pieces to prove an erratic interpretation of their own. In every one of the impossible literary lapses of this book Leacock shoots through the barrage of laughter one straight swift shot to the heart of the thing which he is attacking.

With a love of mankind wide enough to embrace both friends and foes, Leacock occasionally gives expression to his charity. "The lives of great men are doubtless infinitely interesting. But at times I must confess to a sense of reaction and an idea that the ordi-

nary common man is entitled to have his biography written too. It is to illustrate this view that I write the life of John Smith, a man neither good nor great, but just the usual, everyday homo like you and me and the rest of us." The truth of the matter is, however, that Stephen Leacock is not like the rest of us. As Christopher Morley justly complains in his book *Modern Essays*, "One of the unsolved riddles of social injustice is, why should Professor Leacock be so much more amusing than most people?" Persons who take themselves too seriously and life not seriously enough may consider Leacock too much the jester. Perhaps we may say of him what Hazlitt said of Lamb, that, fearing he may go beyond the comprehension of some needy, heart-sore reader and make him uncomfortable, he prefers "to maintain a lower and friendlier level by indulging in nonsense."

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

There is an interesting treatment of Sir William Temple in Taine's *History of English Literature*, Vol. I. Though perhaps too long to be classed as essays, these books have the style and manner of the short-story type: *Travels with a Donkey*, by Stevenson; *The Path to Rome*, by Belloc; *South Sea Idylls*, by Charles Warren Stoddard; *De Profundis*, by Oscar Wilde (or is this an apostrophe to "twilight in the heart"?).

CHAPTER VII

THE BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL ESSAY

We are forever deceiving ourselves with names and theories.—Lamb

Background

Biography and criticism have come down through the ages with Aristotle's logic, bearing ever upon them the stamp of that first great critical and mental analyst, whose "dry and useless branches" of thought produced such futile wrath in the encyclopedic mind of the master aphorist, Bacon. In practically all countries except England biographical and critical literature has developed with literature in general, rising and falling in excellence with it. English biography and especially English literary criticism are characterized by a prolonged yet healthy backwardness, which was due to the rather obvious reason that authors and a single form of "curial" speech were lacking. Myth and legend so cast their glamour over the limited though rich literature of the Anglo-Saxon period that the authorship of most of it was practically unknown. The trilingual state of the language created difficulties, and these were further increased by the variations of Old English dialect which survived through the Conquest until Chaucer brought the vernacular into prominence. Thus it came

about that any attempt at writing critical treatises on literature could but die of sheer discouragement. Then, in the late seventeenth century, when modern English prose was at its early excellence, when the great writers of Elizabeth's day, of the Puritan Age, and of the Restoration period had left a body of literature which is England's proudest boast, when the Renaissance had revived general interest in writing as an art, came Joseph Addison to establish the school of classic, or formal, criticism. But as there are always hidden springs to feed rivers, so there were forerunners of Addison, some of them already known to us as essayists: Bacon, in *The Advancement of Learning*; the character writers, especially Butler; and the rhetoricians Sir Thomas Wilson, Sir John Cheke, and Roger Ascham, who, fashioning their prose with eyes squinted, one on Greece and the other on England, thus served to establish a chastened, correct pattern of writing. Ben Jonson's *Timber* contains some real book criticism; and we are amused to find this classic-minded gentleman, who disliked essays because of their desultoriness and incompleteness, writing essays which attack "all the essayists, even their master Montaigne" and yet at the same time bowing in adoration to his beloved ancients, who can be distinguished only in name from these "despised persons." Then came Dryden to furnish in his essays and prefaces a good serviceable prose style and to develop in his "Essay of Dramatic Poesy" the art of literary criticism, and Izaak Walton to give us in his *Lives* of Doctor Donne, George Herbert, and others model biographies in a quaintly attractive style.

It was the eighteenth-century writers, however, who brought literary criticism into its own. In *A History of Criticism* Saintsbury illustrates this fact by a pleasing figure. "Up to their time Criticism had been a mere Cinderella in the literary household. Aristotle had taken her up as he had taken up all Arts and Sciences. The Rhetoricians had found her a useful handmaid to Rhetoric. Roman *dilettanti* had dallied with her. The solid good sense and good feeling of Quintilian had decided that she must be 'no casual mistress but a wife' (perhaps on rather polygamic principles) to the student of oratory. Longinus had suddenly fixed her colours on his helmet, and had ridden in her honour the most astonishing little *chevauchée* in the annals of adventurous literature. The second greatest poet of the world had done her at once yeoman's service and stately courtesy. And yet she was, in the general literary view, not so much *déclassée* as not classed at all—not 'out,' not accorded the *entrées*." The eighteenth century is the "silver age," the "Augustan period," of English literature; above all, of English prose. In social life there were coffeehouses where elegant manners succeeded the old-time boorish conviviality, *salons* where literary lions—and bears—were given public worship, clubs where satiric dueling caused mental sparks to fly, innumerable periodicals scintillating with wit and humor; in political life there was comparative democracy achieved in the new cabinet form of government; in religious life there was a degree of toleration that must have seemed real freedom in those days. Truly was this an age in which to live and write!

Definition

Matthew Arnold, who stands first among pure critics, says in his essay "On the Function of Criticism" that the purpose of criticism is "to see the object as in itself it really is," and that it is "the endeavor to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world." Obviously vision and judgment are essential to the critical essayist, whose function is "the expert interpretation, appreciation, and evaluation of literary productions." In his history Saintsbury defines literary criticism as "the reasoned exercise of Literary Taste—the attempt, by examination of literature, to find out what it is that makes literature pleasant, and therefore good—the discovery, classification, and as far as possible tracing to their sources, of the qualities of poetry and prose, of style and meter, the classification of literary kinds, the examination and 'proving,' as arms are proved, of literary means and weapons, not neglecting the observation of literary fashions and the like."

The master critics have shown literary criticism to be of several kinds: judicial or deductive, evaluating the work; inductive, either examining the work and describing its contents or seeing in it an expression of environment, classifying it in relation to other works of the same kind and time; subjective or objective; synthetic or analytic. There are grounds for the contention that the critic is not, strictly speaking, a creative artist, but rather a contemplative one, since he works upon already existing literary material; yet, by ennobling and amplifying the work, he often does accom-

plish something very like creation. For such creative criticism as goes beyond what is criticized into further realms of thought, we need only read extracts from Dryden, Addison, Coleridge, Lamb, De Quincey, Carlyle, Arnold, Newman, Thompson, or Repplier. Whether creative or merely contemplative in his work, the critic must be a man of profound learning and of high ideals. "There is nothing more absurd," writes Addison in *The Spectator*, "than for a man to set up for a critic, without a good insight into all the parts of learning. . . . One great mark, by which you may discover a critic who has neither taste nor learning, is this, that he seldom ventures to praise any passage in an author which has not been before received and applauded by the public, and that his criticism turns wholly upon little faults and errors. . . . A true critic ought to dwell rather upon excellencies than imperfections, to discover the concealed beauties of a writer, and communicate to the world such things as are worth their observation."

Early literary criticism busied itself with form and set up single authors as standards to which all others must conform. Modern criticism is more concerned with subject matter and is inclined to pronounce judgment upon the isolated piece of work. M. Hennequin, in his *Scientific Criticism*, sets forth three essentials to criticism: first, observation of the way in which a writer produces his technical effect, by words, sentences, scenes, characters; second, an analysis of the author's personality; third, a study of his readers and admirers. Thus we see how wide is the scope of the biographical

and critical essay, embracing everything from the newspaper book notice to the thorough analysis of literary productions and even of philosophical and scientific pursuits and achievements. How then shall we define it? In the sense in which we are to consider it, this species of essay may be defined as a short treatise upon an author as a man and as a writer, a literary attempt to "interpret, appreciate, and evaluate" in some measure a writer and his work. So much has this type of essay come into its own that the critical review shows in recent times a tendency to usurp the place of the literature which it reviews.

Avocational Essayists

There are several poets and novelists who, being occasional writers of biographical and critical essays, deserve mention before we concern ourselves with the acknowledged masters of this type of essay. Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) added weight of thought to the essay and might have been one of the world's greatest critics if he had been able to carry out his designs logically. William Makepeace Thackeray (1811–1863) interspersed critical views of literature through all his fiction and, despite a certain emotional caprice of judgment, is for the most part sound and catholic in his criticism. James Anthony Froude (1818–1894) has quiet, delightful humor and clear, engaging style which make his *Short Studies* well worth reading; nevertheless he fails as a real critic because he is not interested in literature as literature. James Russell

Lowell (1819–1891) is considered by many judges to be America's best critic. *My Study Windows*, *Among my Books*, and *Old English Dramatists* show his scholarly wisdom, enthusiasm for literature, sane judgment, methodic arrangement, and, what is to be lamented, his inability to admire any work which is not like something standard. Other writers worthy of mention are Sir John Skelton, Francis Parkman, and Walt Whitman.

William Hazlitt (1778–1830)

Beginning his career as a philosopher, Hazlitt said, in his essay "On Public Opinion," that his writings were not "so properly the works of an author by profession as the thoughts of a metaphysician expressed by a painter." Soon after the publication of this essay he became associated with Leigh Hunt in the work of editing a Sunday magazine called the *Examiner*, and thus his journalistic career was seriously begun. Hazlitt contributed also to the *Monthly Magazine*, the *Edinburgh Review*, and the *London Magazine* essays in literary criticism that show trained power of reasoning and strong, incisive style. All his criticism is colored with bitterness and extra-literary prejudice, such as is shown in his panegyric of Sir James Mackintosh, which ends by saying that he "speaks only in quotations; and the pith, the marrow, of Sir James's reasoning and rhetoric at that memorable period might be put within inverted commas." Again, he calls Wordsworth "the spoiled child of disappointment," and refers with cruel bad taste to Coleridge's opium habit.

Hazlitt's criticism is of two kinds: general, which, as is well exemplified in *Lectures on the English Poets*, is stimulating and interesting; and special, which, in such writings as *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* and *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, gives him almost unrivaled place among English critics in his literary faith and hope. His refinement and his masterly manner of expression make one forget his occasional unreasoning prejudice. This "good hater" and no less "intense lover," who strictly classed his personal and his literary acquaintances either as despised enemies or as adored friends, has done charming bits of autobiography in his *Sketches* and *Essays*. His chief glory is his genuine passion for literature, and his chief merit is his ability to awaken in his reader a desire to study with new fervor and thus to appreciate more fully the masterpieces of literary art.

A word should be added concerning Hazlitt's associate Leigh Hunt (1784–1859), a literary Jack-of-all-trades, a two-sided character whose personal and journalistic careers provoked the production of literature concerning them, more important than Hunt's own writings. As unreasoning in his prejudices as was Hazlitt, Hunt was governed in his literary criticism by an innate vulgarity which caused him "to make beautiful things hateful"! While we must commend the quality of his work in *Men, Women, and Books*, *A Jar of Honey from Mount Hybla*, and *Imagination and Fancy*, we cannot but be impatient with his iconoclastic habit of using the great monuments of literature merely as places whereon to engrave his own name.

Thomas De Quincey (1785–1859)

De Quincey was a fellow contributor with Hazlitt and Hunt to the *London Magazine*, in its day so famous. Born in Manchester of a merchant, he studied in the grammar schools of Bath and Manchester, where lack of exercise and too much study brought on the ill health which later caused his opium-eating. After attending Oxford, where he met Coleridge, he went to Grasmere and edited the local paper. Soon he moved to London and published in 1821 his famous *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*. De Quincey's seventy-four years of pain and struggle ended in madness, but the man himself is loved and cherished because of his vast knowledge, unusual memory, and rich diction. Coherence he deliberately sought; figurative and melodious writing was his gift. "Burke was no steersman: he was the Orpheus that sailed with the Argonauts; he was their *seer*, seeing more in his visions than he always understood himself; he was their watcher through the hours of night; he was their astrological interpreter. Who complains . . . of him that reads the stars for being sometimes perplexed?"

De Quincey wrote impassioned prose so well that he stands in a trio with Baxter and Ruskin. He has been called the psychologist of style, and one who reads him must indeed have a deeper respect for our language and literature. His masterly skill in presenting events in order of their importance and his power to carry his reader along on a deep, rhythmic flow of musical sentences are shown in the famous essay on "Murder,

considered as one of the Fine Arts," which became no doubt the inspiration of Stevenson's "Suicide Club." De Quincey's style is based upon the use of the periodic sentence, constructed so as to secure depth of sound and splendor of cadence. It is to be lamented that this great stylist, who has given us the admirable distinction between literature of knowledge and literature of power, should have failed in his subject matter. Perhaps it is not too much to say that his failure in his profession as literary critic was due to his mistaken desire to be humorous, which resulted in a sort of thin jocularity, a capriciousness that makes his opinions unsafe.

Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881)

This Scotchman, characterized by an almost morose gravity of mind, was born at Ecclefechan, and attended school at Edinburgh University with a view to the ministry. Having decided not to become a churchman because of disbelief in the doctrines of his father's church, he studied law and tutored for a living. An invalid and a failure at everything he attempted, he contemplated suicide; but by some mysterious spiritual "rebirth" he determined to become the apostle of the wretched poor. Saturated with German philosophy and desirous of teaching it to the English people, Carlyle translated German romances and published some *Lives* of German writers. He then adopted writing as a career, though it was for him most difficult. In that famous decade in which Lamb, Hazlitt, Hunt, De Quincey, and Irving were at their best, he composed

his *Sartor Resartus*, which on its publication met violent opposition. The appearance of his *French Revolution* in 1837 straightway made him famous. Then came the series entitled *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*. His literary efforts continued till, in 1879, he was the acknowledged head of English letters. Besides the satisfaction of his well-earned reputation he had the friendship of Ruskin, Froude, and Emerson to make his last days happy.

Carlyle's essays are like Montaigne's in independence and in sincerity, but that is all. Montaigne the man is ever before us in his writings; in reading Carlyle we think only of the subject matter. In his hands the essay became consistently objective, and he did much to establish the book-review essay. His writings, like those of Emerson and Newman, treat events and ideas in an independent and discursive but limited manner. Carlyle had almost superhuman vision, which sought out the soul of an author rather than the mere external work. The object of criticism is, he says, to know the man himself, "to show what and how produced was the effect of society upon him; what and how produced was his effect upon society." He believed that a critic must realize the aim of an author and see his highest beauty before he can pronounce judgment. In his earlier essays he is the literary critic directing his attention to form; in his later essays he seems rather to scorn literary art. Carlyle is generally spoken of as "splenetic and rash," yet there is thoughtful tenderness in his treatment of Burns's "life of fragments." "We love Burns, and we pity him; and love and pity are

prone to magnify." Of Johnson he said: "As for Johnson, I have always considered him to be, by nature, one of our great English souls. A strong and noble man; so much left undeveloped in him to the last: in a kindlier element what might he not have been,—poet, priest, sovereign ruler! . . . Great souls are always loyally submissive, reverent to what is over them; only small mean souls are otherwise." As is apparent even in these meager quotations, Carlyle's style is so uncertain that no two persons will agree upon the usual definite array of adjectives to describe it. An hour with Carlyle leaves the reader but the vivid, picturesque, general effect of his essays.

Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800–1859)

Macaulay is the only important nineteenth-century essayist who participated in public affairs and who attained the distinction of burial in Westminster Abbey. Born in Leicestershire of an obscure government official, he soon developed into the most precocious child in history, with fine boyish enthusiasm which he never lost. He studied at Trinity College, Cambridge, and began to practice law, but was elected to Parliament, and then became successively a member of the Supreme Council of India, Lord Rector of the University of Glasgow, and Baron of Rothley. Macaulay was highly interesting, fascinating, and admirable in personality, but as an essayist he fails to attain true greatness because he labored for charm rather than for faithfulness of representation and is most inconsistent. He says, for

example: "There is not, and there never was on this earth, a work of human policy so well deserving of examination as the Roman Catholic Church. The history of that Church joins together the two great ages of human civilization." Could any work of "human policy" deserve the prophecy in this paragraph? "The proudest royal houses are but of yesterday, when compared with the line of the Supreme Pontiffs. . . . The Papacy remains, not in decay, not a mere antique, but full of life and youthful vigor. The Catholic Church is still sending forth to the farthest ends of the world missionaries as zealous as those who landed in Kent with Augustin, and still confronting hostile kings with the same spirit with which she confronted Attila. . . . She saw the commencement of all the governments and of all the ecclesiastical establishments that now exist in the world; and we feel no assurance that she is not destined to see the end of them all. She was great and respected before the Saxon had set foot on Britain, before the Frank had passed the Rhine, when Grecian eloquence still flourished at Antioch, when idols were still worshipped in the temple of Mecca. And she may still exist in undiminished vigour when some traveller from New Zealand shall, in the midst of a vast solitude, take his stand on a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul's." This is more than interesting in the light of Macaulay's equally strong conviction that the destruction of Rome's "work of human policy" was "a consummation devoutly to be wished."

As a critic Macaulay was blessed with competent knowledge of classic and of English literature, but he

was cursed with a "cocksureness," a "swaggering sententiousness which is the very negation of the critical attitude," while his whole bent of mind was too oratorical to permit him the deliberative insight so essential to the critic. Moreover, his interest in literature is not so much for itself as for its bearing on politics and history; hence we are not surprised to find his style imperfect. It is his letters rather than his essays which set forth Macaulay's critical views; and a letter to Napier, one-time editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, is of interest in reference to his criticism. "You cannot suspect me of any affectation of modesty: and you will therefore believe that I tell you what I sincerely think, when I say that I am not successful in analysing the effect of works of genius. . . . Hazlitt used to say of himself, 'I am nothing if not critical.' The case with me is directly the reverse. I have a strong and acute enjoyment of works of the imagination, but I have never habituated myself to dissect them." Herein, doubtless, lies the source of Macaulay's defects of style, which, now the reaction against him has set in, seem to have become more conspicuous than his merits. Ours is the day of subtle style, the style of Stevenson and Thompson, and we are impatient of the brusque, obviously rhetorical devices of Macaulay's prose. Yet, amid the multitudinous seas of literature which the thousands of poorly constructed, leaking literary crafts are attempting to sail, we pause with a moment's reverence to watch the perfectly built ship of Macaulay, manned with its energetic, efficient figures of speech, glide smoothly over the opposing waves.

John Henry Newman (1801–1890)

Cardinal Newman, who, while he bridged over the break in the mid-century by keeping the old traditions alive, also brought English literary criticism up to modern times and standards, was born in London of an English banker and was educated at Oxford. He was ordained in the Anglican Church and appointed vicar of St. Mary's, Oxford. After many years of spiritual unrest and controversy he was received into the Catholic Church, and the tremendous effect of his conversion is of historical interest to both Anglicanism and Catholicism. His *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* should be read by anyone who wishes really to know the great Cardinal and to understand what a wonderful thing autobiography can be. It is, we must admit, without the field of the essay; yet we must digress to recommend it as a study for the attainment of style and to point out its salient characteristics.

In all his writings Newman is the master of a strong, straightforward style, simple in its complexity, vigorous yet apparently effortless, a style as unobtrusive as the clothes of a well-dressed man, yet altogether individual. Clear and direct in teaching; touching his adversaries in controversy with delicate humorous satire; eloquent with the fire of the prophets in defending truth or proclaiming virtue; carrying his reader on a deep-flowing stream of melodious sentences,—he is indeed the perfect prose writer.

Newman had a rare power—that of combining colloquial with impressive and richly imaginative expression

without incongruity. "He," in his own words, from the admirable treatise *Idea of a University*, "expresses what all feel, but all cannot say; and his sayings pass into proverbs among his people, and his phrases become household words and idioms of their daily speech, which is tessellated with the rich fragments of his language, as we see in foreign lands the marbles of Roman grandeur worked into the walls and pavements of modern palaces." Though he knew and used every device for securing the symbolic values of rhythm, there is no trace of artificiality in his careful style, no apparent striving for effect. A part of Newman's definition of a great author may here be applied to himself. "One whose aim is to give forth what he has within him; and from his very earnestness it comes to pass that whatever be the splendor of his diction or the harmony of his periods, he has with him the charm of an incommunicable simplicity." There is very little of the humor of Lamb in his writings, for his subject matter was usually too serious to admit of any levity of treatment. Again applying his own words to himself, we recommend the study of Newman to everyone who wishes to develop his own style: "Whatever be his subject, high or low, he treats it suitably and for its own sake. . . . He writes passionately, because he feels keenly; forcibly, because he conceives vividly; he sees too clearly to be vague; he is too serious to be otiose; he can analyze his subject, and therefore he is rich; he embraces it as a whole and in its parts, and therefore he is consistent; he has a firm hold of it, and therefore he is luminous."

As a literary critic Newman displays illuminative vision in seeing into the heart of the literary artist through the work of art. "In L'Allegro and Il Penseroso the poetical magician invests the commonest scenes of a country life with the hues, first of a cheerful, then of a pensive imagination. It is the charm of the descriptive poetry of a religious mind, that nature is viewed in a moral connexion. Ordinary writers, for instance, compare aged men to trees in autumn—a gifted poet will in the fading trees discern the fading men." As John Campbell Shairp puts it: "He was intimately acquainted with his own heart, and he so read the hearts of his fellowmen, that he seemed to know their inmost secrets. . . . He took what he found within him, as the first of all knowledge, as the thing he was most absolutely certain of. The feelings, desires, aspirations, needs . . . were his original outfit, they fixed his standard of judgment; they furnished the key by which he was to read the riddle of life, and to interpret the world." Surely, since perfect knowledge of self is the first requisite for the critic, it is small wonder that Newman, rare example of the man who is both philosophical and practical, both academic and worldly in his comprehension of life and the business of living, ranks so high among biographical and critical writers.

Matthew Arnold (1822–1888)

Matthew Arnold was born at Laleham and received his preparatory education in the Rugby school, where his father was headmaster. After a brilliant scholastic

career at Oxford, Arnold became inspector of schools. He relieved the monotony of this task by his duties as professor of poetry at Oxford and by a lecture tour in America. One of our few professional critics of the nineteenth century, Arnold has definite and sincere conviction as to the purpose of criticism. "Its business is, as I have said, simply to know the best that is known and thought in the world, and by in its turn making this known, to create a current of true and fresh ideas. Its business is to do this with inflexible honesty, with due ability. . . . [Its business is] to keep man from a self-satisfaction which is retarding and vulgarizing, to lead him towards perfection, by making his mind dwell upon what is excellent in itself, and the absolute beauty and fitness of things. Judging is often spoken of as the critic's one business, and so in some sense it is; but the judgment which almost insensibly forms itself in a fair and clear mind, along with fresh knowledge, is the valuable one; and thus knowledge and ever fresh knowledge, must be the critic's great concern for himself. And it is by communicating fresh knowledge, and letting his own judgment pass along with it,—but insensibly, and in the second place, not the first, as a sort of companion and clue, not as an abstract law giver,—that the critic will generally do most good to his readers."

In announcing further the principles of his criticism Arnold emphasizes the importance of devoting more attention to subject matter than to form, because the form is what might be called the "result" of the subject matter. To prove his theory he explains that the Greeks, "regarded the whole; we regard the parts."

"Their theory and practice alike, the admirable treatise of Aristotle, and the unrivalled works of their poets, exclaim with a thousand tongues—'All depends upon the subject; choose a fitting action, penetrate yourself with the feeling of its situations; this done, everything else will follow.'" This exceedingly free interpretation of Aristotle reads as if Arnold had confused the great Greek's teachings with Wordsworth's anathema against "fine writing." We are tempted to disagree with his contention that Shakespeare's expression was so much *too* good, "too eminent and unrivalled," that it detracted from his subject matter and made him unsafe as a model.

As it would be an almost endless task to review the bulk of Arnold's critical work, we shall content ourselves with a general idea of it. By the majority of rhetoricians he is accorded first place among purely literary critics, not only because of the quantity but also on account of the quality of his criticism. If the true function of criticism is to promote in others "the intelligent, the conscious enjoyment of literature," then Arnold is truly triumphant. To him again, because of his entire freedom from Anglo-Saxon insularity, is the notable credit for having originated comparative criticism of the various national literatures. Finally, the manner as well as the matter of his accomplishment is to be admired. His prose is characterized by a lighthearted vivaciousness, a pure, delicate, spontaneous humor which unveiled absurdity and affectation for its own delectation and which could scent a pompous bore and pursue him with the grace and unbending dignity

of an antiquated tabby cat. In *A History of Criticism* Saintsbury says of Arnold: "He had not the sublime and ever new-inspired inconsistency of Dryden. . . . He had not the robustness of Johnson; the supreme critical 'reason' (as against understanding) of Coleridge; scarcely the exquisite, if fitful, appreciation of Lamb, or the full-blooded and passionate appreciation of Hazlitt. But he had an exacter knowledge than Dryden's; the fineness of his judgment shows finer beside Johnson's bluntness; he could not wool-gather like Coleridge; his range was far wider than Lamb's; his scholarship and his delicacy alike give him an advantage over Hazlitt. Systematic without being hidebound; well-read (if not exactly learned) without pedantry; delicate and subtle, without weakness or dilettanteism; catholic without eclecticism; enthusiastic without indiscriminateness,—Mr. Arnold is one of the best and most precious of teachers on his own side." This illuminating apostrophe not only throws light on several writers in whom we are interested but ought to be sufficient in itself to inspire in the reader the desire to delve further into Saintsbury's admirable comment upon Arnold and other essayists. It seems almost superfluous to mention Arnold's well-known volumes *On Translating Homer*, *The Study of Celtic Literature*, and *Essays in Criticism*, and yet there is always reason to recommend them as reading for those who are trying to attain mastery of style. The collection *Mixed Essays*, which is concerned with the elements and conditions of civilization, deserves a special word of commendation.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)

"The American Carlyle," who was born in Boston of clerical ancestry and educated at Harvard, became pastor of the Second Unitarian Church in his native city, but resigned shortly because of ill health and scruples. Emerson was always a psychological problem, an opponent of Christianity, and an apostle of pantheism, which, strangely enough, he interpreted as individualism. Thinking himself to be a spark from the divine, he resolved never to speak or write a word that was not entirely his own. This resolution of the writer was also the resolution of the man. "We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds. . . . A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men." How interesting—would it were not worse than interesting—is this substituting for the "divine right of kings" the "divine right of every man"! It is indeed strange that most modern teachers fail to see how the fire of undisciplined revolution smoldering under the fine-sounding eloquence of Emerson inevitably bursts into active conflagration when assimilated into the minds of the young and imaginative.

The philosophy of this influential transcendentalist, if we may call his medley of ideas philosophy, combines universality with particularity, as is apparent in his essays. The essay on Plato is a notable example of his tendency to think in circles, a tendency which is manifest also in his style. Statements are reiterated,

metamorphosed, until they blunder back into their original form, and the reader's mind goes zigzagging on and on—till perhaps by some happy chance it bumps into one of its own solid concepts of truth leading to orderly thought, or, if not saved thus, it learns Emerson's own unhappy way of spiritual unrest. Emerson is, nevertheless, one of the most fascinating prose writers in English literature. His wonderful eloquence, with its almost unlimited figurative range, its easy plasticity, its scintillating brilliance, is the rich, alluring cloak that clothes his pernicious philosophy—a philosophy which was the first bond between him and his lifelong friend, Carlyle. Yet Emerson is not a stylist in the artistic sense; his writings lack composition, for he does not, except in *English Traits*, progress in orderly fashion from a beginning, through a middle, to a logical end. He simply stops writing. In his failure to mold details together and to create a single impression he attains the very acme of the composite without composition. This failure makes his ideas and images as vague as if seen through a mist. His essays are bundles of apt quotations—a fact difficult to reconcile with his determination to speak no word not his own. Everybody has read such essays as "Self-Reliance," "Love," "Friendship," and everyone who reads them intelligently finds himself wishing that the author would tell him what he is talking about in such admirable fashion. As a critic Emerson is usually too general to be trustworthy; yet he is suggestive, and he often inspires his reader to study the works of the author whom he is considering —a consummation devoutly to be wished by the critic.

Walter Horatio Pater (1839–1894)

As a writer of impassioned prose and as a critic of art and of literature Walter Pater is noteworthy. For him the love of beauty was a real passion, which inspired him to write with lyric fire and to weave his prose into exquisite modulations like a strain of music. When thus inspired he forgot his definite, carefully chiseled, and subtle style of ordinary writing, which evinces unmistakable artificiality. Pater employs criticism as a means for self-revelation rather than for revelation of the author he is treating or revelation of the society that has made him what he is. In *The Renaissance* he tells us that self is the one important thing in our contact with the world: "While all melts under our feet, we may well catch at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or work of the artist's hands, or the face of one's friend. . . . With this sense of the splendour of our experience and of its awful brevity, gathering all we are into one desperate effort to see and touch, we shall hardly have time to make theories about the things we see and touch. . . . The theory . . . which requires of us the sacrifice of any part of this experience . . . or some abstract theory we have not identified with ourselves . . . has no real claim upon us." This, from the pen of a man whose shadowy personality has baffled his biographers and his critics, is most interesting in that it seems to proclaim him as a disciple

of the decadent theory of individualism. One must always beware, however, of jumping at conclusions concerning the man behind an isolated paragraph. One must bear in mind also that there are two types of persons who build impenetrable walls around their inner nature, the self-concentrated and the self-forgetful. Which was Pater? That is indeed the question which, aside from the debate concerning his merits as a stylist, has caused the entire controversy regarding him. We are inclined to think that if Pater had not been so entirely an æsthete, if he had not been so engrossed in his sensuous reaction to beauty, but had studied instead the nature of beauty itself, he might have become a dominating personality fired with desire of the quest of the Beauty which is divine Truth. Failing this, he remained the merely intellectual contemplative of the beauty that is ideal, he who might have become the spiritual contemplative of the Beauty that is reality—the mystic of God.

Pater was born in London and received his education at Enfield, at Canterbury, and at Oxford. His personal life was lived in colleges as fellow, tutor, dean, and lecturer, and, being a self-contained life, subjective, and passed practically in one place, presents few "leading points" for the delectation of a biographer. But the scope of his writings is wide, and his interests are many. When he is vitally concerned with a subject he gives us prose which can best be described as "linkèd sweetness long drawn out." His style is almost too aggressively pronounced to come under the usual definition, "the author's self." In his attitude toward those with whom

he came in contact Pater was a shy, retiring, childlike character. But there is no sign of diffidence or of hesitation in his critical judgments. Those who have a certain partiality for searchlike lucidity in the written word—and we confess ourselves to be among them—find his essay on "Style" difficult to read because he carries out so perfectly his own dictum, "A scholar writing for the scholarly, he will of course leave something to the willing intelligence of his reader." He makes no secret of the fact that he is writing for the "select few," those "men of a finer thread" who have formed and maintain the literary ideal. While we love to count ourselves among the "select few," we are nevertheless constrained to turn for comfort to Charles Kingsley's remark: "If I am ever obscure in my expression, do not fancy that therefore I am deep. If I were really deep, all the world would understand," or to Landor's equally pertinent observation, "Clear writers, like clear fountains, do not seem so deep as they are." Pater's ideal is the sentence packed with thought, the composition which has no place for the merely ornamental, for he believes that "the true artist may be best recognized by his tact of omission." "He will remember that, as the very word ornament indicates what is in itself non-essential, so the 'one beauty' of all literary style is of its very essence, and independent, in prose and verse alike, of all removable decoration; that it may exist in its fullest lustre . . . in a composition utterly unadorned, with hardly a single suggestion of visibly beautiful things."

Pater, though very religious as a child, later became a pagan, relying for guidance only on his own conscience. As the years passed, however, he came more and more to feel the need of some norm of conduct outside himself. Hence we find even in his essays in pure literary criticism a striving after the solace of creeds, a search after truth. Perhaps it will not be too much to say that his passion for beauty was so great because he identified beauty with concrete expressions of truth. Art was to him the means by which man's inner self could come to the surface and communicate its aspirations to the inner self of another. But these aspirations must be great if the art is to be great. "Given the conditions I have tried to explain as constituting good art; —then, if it be devoted further to the increase of men's happiness, to the redemption of the oppressed, or the enlargement of our sympathies with each other, or to such presentment of new or old truth about ourselves and our relation to the world as may ennoble and fortify us in our sojourn here, or immediately, as with Dante, to the glory of God, it will be also great art; if, over and above those qualities I have summed up as mind and soul—that colour and mystic perfume, and that reasonable structure, it has something of the soul of humanity in it, and finds its logical, its architectural place, in the great structure of human life." One can but admire an artist who had such sincere ideals of his art.

Francis Thompson (1859–1907)

Some few years ago, a brilliant star shot suddenly into the literary firmament, a perfect furore was created in the placid citadels of English learning, and bitter complaints were heard because the young men of Oxford and Cambridge forsook Tennyson that they might read only Thompson. It is with loving reverence that we come to speak of this great poet who walked with God, upon whose lips live coals from the altar were laid. Truly worthy of Thompson is William Lyon Phelps's portrait of him, exalted "in a mystical ecstasy, all a wonder and a wild desire," while he poured forth strange figures of speech, molten metal of language. As a long-imprisoned bird after a taste of freedom comes fluttering back to the safety of its cage, so the heart of Thompson, everlastingly imprisoned in the divine love, fled on the glorious wings of song through all the heights of heaven and the depths of hell, only to find itself spent and weary, yet safe at last in the peace of absolute surrender.

Thompson was born at Preston, Lancashire. His father was a provincial middle-class doctor, and the son was educated at Owens for the profession of medicine. Hating intensely the idea of a medical career, he evaded it by running away from college. He went to London, where, during three years of constant suffering from the miseries of destitution and incipient disease, he contracted the opium habit. Despite his wretchedness he composed during these years "Dream-Tryst," "Paganism Old and New," and some other bits

of prose and verse, all of which he sent to Wilfrid Meynell, author of the magazine *Merry England*. Meynell soon rescued him from his sad condition and introduced him to his own select circle of friends, whose wholehearted welcome and expectations were straightway more than justified by Thompson's earnest production of both poetry and prose.

The larger part of his prose is critical, and it is especially interesting because he is a great poet writing about his own art, and because he is so fine an example of his own teaching that "it might almost be erected into a rule that a great poet is, if he please, also a master of prose." The "poets' poet," the Shelley whom he immortalized in the essay with which on its publication "all London was ringing," also illustrates Thompson's theory. Shelley in his "Defense of Poetry" tells us: "Poetry is indeed something divine . . . the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds. . . . Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man . . . turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed; it marries exultation and horror, grief and pleasure, eternity and change; it subdues to union under its light yoke all irreconcilable things. It transmutes all that it touches, and every form moving within the radiance of its presence is changed by wondrous sympathy to an incarnation of the spirit which it breathes; . . . it strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty which is the spirit of its forms."

Thompson's essay on "Shelley" shows the critic's power to see into the heart of the poet through his poetry. "Coming to Shelley's poetry, we peep over the wild mask of revolutionary metaphysics, and we see the winsome face of the child. Perhaps none of his poems is more purely and typically Shelleian than *The Cloud*, and it is interesting to note how essentially it springs from the faculty of make-believe. The same thing is conspicuous, though less purely conspicuous, throughout his singing; it is the child's faculty of make-believe raised to the *n*th power. He is still at play, save only that his play is such as manhood stops to watch, and his playthings are those which the gods give their children. The universe is his box of toys. He dabbles his fingers in the day-fall. He is gold-dusty with tumbling amidst the stars. He makes bright mischief with the moon. The meteors nuzzle their noses in his hand. He teases into growling the kennelled thunder, and laughs at the shaking of its fiery chain. He dances in and out of the gates of heaven: its floor is littered with his broken fancies. He runs wild over the fields of ether. He chases the rolling world. He gets between the feet of the horses of the sun. He stands in the lap of patient Nature, and twines her loosened tresses after a hundred wilful fashions, to see how she will look nicest in his song."

This is a poet's interpretation and appreciation of a poet, and with what swallow-flights of song does Thompson describe him, for is not each of these short sentences a song, unmistakable prose though it be? Note now the change in Thompson's mood and tone

when he speaks of Shelley's death. "Enchanted child, born into a world unchildlike; spoiled darling of Nature, playmate of her elemental daughters; 'pard-like spirit, beautiful and swift,' laired amidst the burning fastnesses of his own fervid mind; bold foot along the verges of precipitous dream; light leaper from crag to crag of inaccessible fancies; towering Genius, whose soul rose like a ladder between heaven and earth with the angels of song ascending and descending it;—he is shrunken into the little vessel of death, and sealed with the unshatterable seal of doom, and cast down deep below the rolling tides of Time. . . . Into that sacred bridal-gloom of death where he holds his nuptials with eternity let not our rash speculations follow him; let us hope rather that . . . amidst the supernatural universe, some tender undreamed surprise of life in doom awaited that wild nature, which, worn by warfare with itself, its Maker, and all the world, now sleeps."

Thompson is a master of paradox. In "The Way of Imperfection" he fears that "unless some voice be raised in timely protest . . . English art (in its widest sense) must soon dwindle to the extinction of unendurable excellence." He speaks of the "brilliantly unromantic, splendidly commonplace career" of Macaulay. "Alas for the nineteenth century," he exclaims, "with so much pleasure, and so little joy; so much learning, and so little wisdom; . . . so many philosophers, and such little philosophy; so many seers, and such little vision; so many prophets, and such little foresight." Thompson was master of every device of style, as might be shown by endless citations. Greater than

this is the spirit of his writings, aflame with religious passion, sincere with unquestioning faith, borne on the wings of unutterable hope, wrapped in the arms of unescapable love.

Agnes Repplier (1858–)

Agnes Repplier, an American of French descent who has been decidedly influenced in her writings by her ancestry, was born in Philadelphia. She was educated at the Sacred Heart Convent, Torresdale, Pennsylvania, which institution she has well-nigh immortalized by the lively reminiscences of her schoolgirl life in her winsome book *In our Convent Days*. In 1902 she was awarded an honorary doctorate by the university of her native state. *Points of View*, *Essays in Miniature*, and *Compromises* are all essays in literary criticism, sometimes very prettily disguised. These found an eager public waiting to receive them, because her first publication in book form, *Books and Men*, had already brought her prominence and popularity. Companionable and clever, cultured and charming, with just enough contrariness to defend the attacked or to slur the adulated, she piques her reader to read more and more. She sticks the hatpin of her wittiness into the moderns who think the world began in 1900 or, at the remotest, in 1830. When she read Charles Dudley Warner's statement that "since 'Gulliver' there has been no piece of original humor produced in England equal to Knickerbocker's 'New York,'" she wrote, "Does this mean that Mr. Warner considers Washington Irving

to be the equal of Jonathan Swift; that he places the gentle satire of the American alongside of those trenchant and masterly pages which constitute the landmarks of literature?" "Swift," she continues, "is a writer whom we may be permitted to detest, but not to undervalue. His star, red as Mars, still flames fiercely in the horizon, while the genial luster of Washington Irving grows dimmer year by year. We can never hope to 'recover our balance' by confounding values, a process of self-deception which misleads no one but ourselves."

Miss Repplier's criticism is illuminating, sparkling, and witty, and her style is peerless. Criticism and style are at their best in her comments on Lamb. "Truest of all, is Charles Lamb who, more than any other humorist, more than any other man of letters, perhaps, belongs exclusively to his own land, and is without trace or echo of foreign influence. France was to Lamb, not a place where the finest prose is written, but a place where he ate frogs—'the nicest little delicate things—rabbity-flavored. Imagine a Lilliputian rabbit.' Germany was little or nothing, and America was less. The child of London streets,

> Mother of mightier, nurse of none more dear,

rich in the splendid literature of England, and faithful lover both of the teeming city and the ripe old books, Lamb speaks to English hearts in a language they can understand. And we, his neighbors, whom he recked not of, hold him just as dear; for his spleenless humor is an inheritance of our mother tongue . . . for which no payment is possible save the frank and generous

recognition of a pleasure that is without a peer." How well, nevertheless, does this enticing critic understand that one nation "is not all the world," and that the truly great book is, despite the birthplace and the native spirit of its author, a universal possession. "Books of every age and of every nation show a charming adaptability in their daily intercourse; and, if left to themselves, will set off each other's merits in the most amiable and disinterested manner, each one growing better by contact with its excellent neighbor. It is only when the patriotic critic comes along, and stirs up dissensions in their midst, that this peaceful atmosphere is rent with sudden discord; that the English book grows disdainful and supercilious; the American, aggressive and sarcastic; the French, malicious and unkind. It is only when we apply to them a test which is neither wise nor worthy that they show all their bad qualities, and afford a wrangling ground for the ill-natured reviewers of two continents."

Those of us who grow weary of endless and bitterly disputatious classifications of literature cannot but join whole-heartedly in Miss Repplier's protest against such literary sacrilege. "It is useless, and worse than useless, to dispute over the respective schools of fiction, instead of gladly enjoying that which we like best; and there are different kinds of enjoyment for different kinds of work. For my part, the good novel of character is the novel I can always pick up; but the good novel of incident is the novel I can never lay down." As for *Counter Currents*, that delightful and illuminating commentary on some of our modern pet "isms," we can but recom-

mend it in its entirety. Its only fault, if fault it be, is, as Chesterton would express it, that of having "excessive sense."

James Gibbons Huneker (1860–1921)

James Huneker received both a literary and a musical heritage from his immediate ancestors. He was a native of Philadelphia and attended school at Roth's Military Academy and the Law Academy in that city. After studying piano with Theodore Ritter in Paris, he was associated for ten years with Rafael Joseffy, as teacher of piano at the National Conservatory of Music in New York City, and afterwards held positions as musical and as dramatic critic on the staff of the *New York Recorder*, the *Morning Advertiser*, and the *New York Sun*. Besides his books on music he published four volumes of critical essays: *Promenades of an Impressionist*; *Egoists: A Book of Supermen*; *Iconoclasts: A Book of Dramatists*; and *Visionaries*.

Huneker studied the man through his work, and the work in the light of his knowledge of the man, as is shown in his analysis of Strindberg's *Inferno*. "Strindberg's misogyny is the keynote of his early work. He hates woman. . . . His own married life was so unhappy that he revenges himself by attacking the entire sex. Every book, every play, is a confession. He is the most subjective dramatist and poet of his age. . . . Besides, Strindberg is a good hater, and good haters are rare and stimulating spectacles. . . . Inferno is the very quintessence of Strindberg. Written between

two attacks—his unstable nerves send him at intervals into retreat—it is the most awful portrayal of mental suffering ever committed to paper. Poe said in one of his Marginalia that the man who dared to write the story of his heart would fire the paper upon which he wrote. This Strindberg has dared to do with a freedom, a diabolical minuteness, that make the naïve stutterings of Verlaine and the sophisticated confessions of Huysmans mere literature." These sentences show a fine critical purpose frustrated. Huneker's attempt to reveal the man behind the work led him into a confusion of values—the flame of life in Strindberg as compared to Verlaine is perhaps as a bonfire to a conflagration.

However much we may at times take issue with Huneker on the score of moral principle in criticism, we must accord him a place among the modern critics in view of his efforts to portray the man behind the work, his careful and correct estimate of the style of the subject he is considering, and, above all, his unhampered virility of expression, his frugal phrasing, his search for truth, and his clear understanding of the function of the critic. "A critic is a man who expects miracles. So it has become the general practice to ignore a poet in his totality and seek only for isolated traits. And then the trouble we take to search for what a man is not: the lack of humour in Shelley, the lack of spirituality in Byron, the lack of sanity in Nietzche, the lack of melody in Richard Strauss!" In his essay on "Literature and Art" he tells us, in the section "Concerning Critics": "As art is art and not nature, criticism is criticism and not art. It professes to interpret the artist's work, and

at best it mirrors his art mingled with the personal temperament of the critic. At the worst the critic lacks temperament (artistic training is, of course, an understood requisite), and when this is the case, God help the artist! As the greater includes the lesser, the artist should permit the critic to enter, with all due reverence, his sacred domain. Without vanity the one, sympathetic the other. Then the ideal collaboration ensues." After a clever refutation of the theory that criticism must be written by artists only, he concludes, "Nevertheless, every day of his humble career must the critic pen his *apologia pro vita sua*." Surely Huneker is speaking here out of the fullness of his experience as a paragrapher on the wonder of fine art.

Stuart Pratt Sherman (1881–)

We live in an age of Bolshevists, political, intellectual, and moral, an age in which laws, principles, and creeds are out of date. As always, literature mirrors the times, and so we find the spirit of revolt flourishing among present-day writers. The reading public, too, is most receptive; the more violent the revolt, the wilder the vagary that a book proclaims, the more hearty is its welcome. The critics, moreover, seem with few exceptions, to favor this spirit of lawlessness and to encourage the obvious desire of the authors to be so free in the expression of their individual theories that they will not brook even the repressing bounds of classification according to their favorite "isms." It is something, then, to take up a book by an author who is willing to risk the imputation of out-of-dateness through his adherence to

certain fixed standards of criticism which savor strongly of the ten laws of Mount Sinai and of the almost equally old principles of literary excellence, and who has enough courage of conviction to classify without equivocation and in accordance with these fixed standards the writers he treats.

One of the finest achievements in Sherman's book *On Contemporary Literature*—a volume compiling revised and enlarged essays, originally contributed to the magazine *The Nation*—is the table of contents. One might forget pages of Mr. Sherman's courageous and convincing reasoning, but it is simply impossible to forget the illuminating titles of his essays. Moreover, to read his table of contents is to know that the author has certain standards of judgment and that he has measured the writers by them. The book is so perfectly done that it is sufficient to secure Sherman's place among contemporary critics. A review of the first essay in the book, "The Democracy of Mark Twain," will manifest the spirit and the insight of Sherman's criticism.

Democracy is a great though overworked word, and so lovers of Mark Twain are glad to see it linked to the name of the stanch old American. The humorist was a real American, and his foreign travels and experiences made him still more so. This Americanism Mr. Sherman makes synonymous with democracy. Mark Twain's democracy was his very self; he could not comprehend those fine barriers of reserve and self-reverence which are just as essentially a part of the born aristocrat. His idea of the brotherhood of man was a kind of give-and-take equality. "He was of the people and for the people

at all times." There are those who accuse him of lacking reverence for everything fine and good; and yet in his "chivalric treatment" of her life he brought Joan of Arc closer to the American people than perhaps any saint has ever been brought.

Mark Twain is a writer for those dull days when we forget our nationhood. He is an antidote to depression; when we laugh at him we laugh the more heartily because we are really laughing at ourselves. How much more wholesome is laughter at self than self-pity, a most prevalent moral disease. We Americans unite in time of war, but our national spirit ebbs low in time of peace—perhaps because we have no glamour of royalty to shed luster on our common selves. Is it because we are so common that we do not produce great literature? If it be so—and many think it is—why is it that, as Mr. Chesterton tells us, "We hear much of Americans being educated on English literature; but I think few Americans realize how much English children have been educated on American literature." In this same chapter of his illuminating book *What I saw in America*, the same man who was reassured to learn from our immigrant questionnaire "that anarchists and polygamists are so pure and good that the police have only to ask them questions and they are certain to tell no lies," continues: "I know few men in England who have not left their boyhood to some extent lost and entangled in the forests of *Huckleberry Finn*. I know few women in England, from the most revolutionary Suffragette to the most carefully preserved Early Victorian, who will not confess to having passed a happy childhood with the *Little*

Women of Miss Alcott. *Helen's Babies* was the first and by far the best book in the modern scriptures of baby-worship. And about all this old-fashioned American literature there was an undefinable savour that satisfied, and even pleased, our growing minds. Perhaps it was the smell of growing things; but I am far from certain that it was not simply the smell of wood." This tribute from the man whom Stephen Leacock calls "the greatest literary man of England—at least according to size" is most acceptable because of Mr. Chesterton's whole-hearted pride in England and her literature. To those who think us too common to produce great literature Sherman writes, "When Mark Twain, robust, big-hearted, gifted with the divine power to use words, makes us all laugh together, builds true romances with prairie fire and Western clay, and shows us that we are at one on all the main points, we feel that he has been appointed by Providence to see to it that the precious ordinary self of the Republic shall suffer no harm." *The Mysterious Stranger,* a posthumous publication, shows another aspect of Mark Twain. It has no whole-hearted, uproarious fun; it reveals a passion of hate for oppression; it is the despairing outburst of a man whose belief in human kindliness and in liberty has been outraged too often. Somehow Mark Twain's laughter, in the light of this book, makes one think of the genial Lamb, who laughed that he might not weep; though there is not in the American the delicate, tender humor of that prince of English essayists.

Mr. Sherman has sane standards and is not afraid to apply them. In an age when any fanatic is able to

originate a "literary school," and when acquaintance with the newest and most unsavory best seller is indispensable to one's literary up-to-dateness, it is something to find a critic who comes boldly forward to speak principles that are as old as the ages and as perennial as they are old. Small wonder that he arouses the ire of H. L. Mencken for his "effort to apply the Espionage Act to the arts" and for his "maxim that Puritanism is the official philosophy of America, and that all who dispute it are enemy aliens and should be deported." Indeed, in this our day criticism of criticism seems to threaten the sway of criticism of creative literature.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

There is, of course, almost too vast an amount of literature on criticism. Especially recommended are *A History of Criticism* (3 vols.), by Saintsbury; *Principles and Methods of Literary Criticism*, by Sears; *Literary Criticism*, by Gayley and Scott; *Phases of Thought and Criticism*, by Brother Azarias; *The Principles of Criticism*, by Worsfold; and *A Handbook of Literary Criticism*, by Sheran. As for the critics and biographers themselves, the author's work has been the difficult one of selection, and she can but beg others to remember *De gustibus non est disputandum.* Among the moderns the author wishes to call attention to *Reviews and Critical Papers*, by Lionel Johnson, and to the critical works of Christopher Morley, Augustine Birrell, George E. Woodberry, William Ernest Henley, J. Churton Collins, Frederic Harrison, Andrew Lang, Edmund Gosse, Walter Bagehot, Sir Arthur T. Quiller-Couch, E. E. Hale (*Dramatists of To-day*), and H. L. Mencken.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ESSAY OF THE NATURALISTS

To him who in the love of nature holds
Communion with her visible forms, she speaks
A various language.— BRYANT

BACKGROUND

The attainment of intellectual satisfaction and ensuing rest is the most fantastic of all life's chimeras. The mind no less than the heart of man is ordained to unrest; for search after truth is the divinely imposed law of earth, and Vision of Truth is reserved for Heaven. Failing the attainment of the peace of full Vision which surpasses understanding, one could but desire annihilation. There is, indeed, no true intellectual peace in this world—unless we except the mental state of those placid parasites on intelligence, the serene bosom of whose cognitive life is never disturbed by a passing ripple of thought. The high-water mark of mental unrest is in the mind of the philosophical scientist, who necessarily must prefer "the leap of the torrent before the stillness of the swamp."

Having thus introduced the scientist, we have also raised two moot questions. The first question has to do with the relation between theology and science, an issue not to be lightly omitted in a discussion of certain

of the scientists with whom we are to concern ourselves. Now that the once hot controversy between them lies in its own ashes, now that the correct relationship has been ascertained, the diatribes of scientists against theologians and the anathemas of theologians against scientists seem rather absurd to us who, through no virtue of our own, know the truth that science can never contradict theology. Here it is interesting to turn back the pages of controversial literature to the writings of that stern old pioneer in American Catholic intellectual respectability, Orestes A. Brownson. "Though faith and science can never be in contradiction," he contends, "yet much that passes for faith may be in contradiction with science, and much that passes for science may be in contradiction with faith. This contradiction, indeed, affects neither what is really faith nor what is really science, but in minds not sufficiently instructed to draw sharply, on the one hand, the line between what is faith and what is only theological opinion, and, on the other, between what is science and what is only the opinion or conjecture of scientific men, it has the inevitable effect of creating, on the one side, a prejudice against science and, on the other, a prejudice against faith."

Now, the theologian is the first to applaud the giant strides of scientific discovery, for he knows that the reasons for his faith will be but the more abundantly demonstrated. On May 10, 1922, the present custodian of faith, His Holiness Pope Pius XI, addressing the members of the International Astronomical Union and of the International Geodetic and Geophysical

Union in audience with him, said: "The science which you profess is the most beautiful and the noblest of all that exist: it is a guide on the road to Truth, to that Truth which ought to be the object of all our desires. . . . Our admiration for the Universe, for that marvellous divine construction of which you understand the laws, its grandeur and its harmony, induces us to venerate the Creator of this wonderful edifice, and you yourselves ought to feel nearer to Him than those who are strangers to your observations and researches." Knowing that science and faith have their common source in Eternal Truth, why should one fear conflict between them? Seeming conflict appears only through distortion or misconception of fact. "Take, then," writes Brownson, "all the facts on which the naturalists support their hypotheses, they establish nothing against faith. The facts really established either favor faith or are perfectly compatible with it; and if any are alleged that seem to militate against it, they are either not proved to be facts, or their true character is not fully ascertained, and no conclusion from them can be taken as really scientific. . . . The sciences deal with facts and causes of the secondary order; and it is very certain that one may determine the quality of an acorn as food for swine without considering the first cause of the oak that bore it. . . . The order of facts with which the sciences deal no doubt depends on the order revealed by faith; . . . but it does not lie within the province of the particular sciences as such to show this dependence or this connection, and our *savants* invariably blunder whenever they attempt to do it, or to rise from

the special to the general, the particular to the universal, or from the sciences to faith. . . . All that faith demands of the sciences as such is their silence. She does not demand their support, she only demands that they keep in their own order." In thus settling the obstreperous scientist, Brownson points out the true cause of the offender's revolt against faith, its so-called limitations on the freedom of science. Yet Brownson at the same time settles the Christian apologists who stress too strongly the tendency of the sciences to corroborate the doctrines of revelation. "The fact is, the sciences are not science (philosophy), and lie quite below the sphere of both science (philosophy) and faith."

As for the animosity of scientists against what they consider restriction of freedom, that is no longer blamed solely on religionists. Only the ignorant are free in intellect, having no first principles or premises from which to proceed. The only restriction which religion places for science is to forbid its leaving its own boundaries to encroach on the domain of revelation, a favorite diversion of science in Brownson's day, a diversion growing from a deep-seated need of human nature. "Yet as the sciences are insufficient, while restricted to their proper sphere, to satisfy the demand of reason for apodictic principles, for unity and universality, there is a perpetual tendency in the men devoted exclusively to their culture to draw from them conclusions which are unwarranted, illogical, and antagonistic both to philosophy and to faith. Against this tendency . . . there is in natural science alone no sufficient safeguard,

and consequently we need the supernatural light of revelation to protect both faith and science itself." This restriction on science can in no way interfere with the freedom of scientific research or of the conclusions of science. The very term "freedom of science" is itself a paradox; for how can science, which obeys the most inexorable of all laws and deals with the most stubborn of all things, facts, be said to have and to exercise freedom. This old and unnecessary controversy is but another illustration of the fact that not the least result of the darkened intellect inherited from our first parents is an almost ludicrous though sometimes disastrous tendency toward making much ado about nothing. The most vociferous soap-box orator as well as the inspired and appointed leader of men can be assured of an enthusiastic if fickle following.

Definition

Our introduction of the scientist presents to us a second difficulty. In our definition of the essay we drew a sharp line between the literary production and the strictly scientific treatise. But there are certain writers who are at the same time literary and scientific, writers who use all the sweet-toned notes of literature to voice their truths and their falsehoods. In fact, such is their talent for happy exposition that their literary quality has sometimes cast reflection on their work as investigators and discoverers. For they have clothed the ungainly and rigid specter of science in the warm flesh and blood of human sympathy, they have robed her in

the rustling garments of silken and silver language, and they have given her the lustrous eye of poetry and the brave voice of honest and thoughtful prose. Thus their genius has reconciled two seemingly irreconcilable things and has changed apparent opposites into supplements. They seem, then, perforce, to demand space in our consideration of the essay; and so, swept into the tide of nineteenth-century naturalism, we can but say *Marchons!*

Naturalism, or the investigation, description, and interpretation of nature, does not belong solely to the naturalistic essayists. It made Wordsworth the apostle of a school of poetry whose chief business was uninspired imitation of nature; it flowered into the sensuousness of beauty-loving Keats; it kept the child's heart alive in the revolutionary metaphysician Shelley; it passed through the glorification of elemental human passion in Byron; it became for the mystic Thompson the means to brotherhood with nature, "God's daughter, who stretches her hand only to her Father's friends"; and, in this our day, except for the chosen few who treasure it in its pristine loveliness, its once untarnished name has come to be in the hands of the writers, especially writers of fiction, the opaque glass wherein is contained the poison of unadulterated animalism. Naturalism has indeed fallen on evil ways and in evil times; for, as breathed forth from the flower-sweet prose of its masters, it is one of the glories of literature.

Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–1895)

In a letter from this eminent naturalist to Charles Kingsley occurs the sentence "Science seems to me to teach in the highest and strongest manner the great truth which is embodied in the Christian conception of entire surrender to the will of God." This statement is doubly interesting when compared with an extract from Huxley's autobiographical sketch of 1894, "I have subordinated any reasonable or unreasonable ambition for scientific fame which I may have permitted myself to entertain, to other ends: . . . to the untiring opposition to that ecclesiastical spirit, that clericalism, which in England, as everywhere else and to whatever denomination it may belong, is the deadly enemy of science." As regards religion (and why is it that most persons who have no religion are always talking about it?) this keen-minded scientist tried most unscientifically to fuse two mutually repellent ideas: to combine love and worship of Christ with violent defiance to orthodox Christianity. This attempt was of course due to his failure to comprehend the fact that if Christ Himself deserves worship, the manner of worship which He established deserves observance. Huxley revered but one thing, a fact; and the existence of Christ, unknown and unknowable, was to him a fact. When this fact took its intermittent possession of his mind, all his repudiation of faith became as naught, all the wonders of the physical universe and all the ethics of tribunal evolution became as mere shadows of the one great reality. "Sit down before fact as a little child," he

writes, "be prepared to give up every preconceived notion, follow humbly wherever and to whatever abysses nature leads, or you shall learn nothing. I have only begun to learn content and peace of mind since I have resolved at all risks to do this." Why could he not have written instead, "Sit down before *faith* as a little child," for faith and fact differ only in degree and not in kind.

Huxley was proud of being the first to use the word "agnostic" to designate one who is conscious of the inadequacy of our knowledge to solve the problem What is the reality corresponding to our ultimate scientific, philosophical, and religious ideas? Yet one would expect a man of such intellectual integrity and of an indomitable pugnacity which never sought to destroy without rebuilding, to understand that a title meaning negation is unworthy a serious philosopher. Now that his scientific quarrel with religion is as so much dead timber, we may dismiss his sincere though mistaken philosophical writings and devote ourselves to his personality and to the vernal beauties of his descriptive and interpretative writings on nature.

Huxley was blessed with an artistic temperament, a fine innate taste, and an integrity of mind which set him resolutely in quest of truth and of clear expression of truth. As a lecturer he was incisive and illuminating, with the ability to bring his abstract ideas down to the level of his audience. Simple, natural, and likable in personality, he won friends everywhere, and not only friends but disciples as well. In controversy, however, he spared neither friend nor foe, and so won the appellation "a first-class fighting man." His dignity and charm

are evident in his writings, which are so individual that they ever proclaim their author. Huxley could never be classed among the lukewarm, who win neither love nor hatred; in fact, he cannot be classed at all, for he is too conspicuously himself. Chesterton speaks of him as "a square-jawed, simple man, greedy of controversy but scornful of sophistry, dead to mysticism but very much alive to morality!" "Huxley," he continues, "was much more a literary than a scientific man. It is amusing to note that when Huxley was charged with being rhetorical, he expressed his horror of 'plastering the fair face of truth with that pestilent cosmetic, rhetoric,' which is itself about as well-plastered a piece of rhetoric as Ruskin himself could have managed." And, indeed, no one can question Huxley's knowledge of rhetorical values. Note the onward swing of this paragraph. "We have long since emerged from the heroic childhood of our race, when good and evil could be met with the same 'frolic welcome'; the attempts to escape from evil, whether Indian or Greek, have ended in flight from the battle-field; it remains to us to throw aside the youthful over-confidence and the no less youthful discouragement of nonage. We are grown men, and must play the man, . . . cherishing the good that falls in our way, and bearing the evil, in and around us, with stout hearts set on diminishing it."

Huxley has a living, leaping style which makes one forget that it hides oftentimes a superficial ignorance of ideas and considerations freighted with great concern to men of more profound mental life than his. His style is that of neither the philosopher nor the scientist; it is

neither serene nor ponderous. Huxley goes into verbal battle with a song on his lips. His writings abound with quotations from every kind of literature, and one never knows just what old literary friend will greet him when he turns the pages of an essay. Once for all, he took the literature of science down from the bookshelves of the ill-smelling science laboratory, aired it in the sunlight of his literary genius, and gave it to the world which, before him, had refused to seek its musty volumes.

John Tyndall (1820–1893)

In these days when our enterprising reporters furnish us interviews in which literary men and moving-picture actors discuss sociology, spiritism, and medicine, in which doctors and scientists discuss suffrage and style in women's clothes, and when the simple-minded gentle reader of these interviews is supposed to receive their pronouncements with the credulity due to an ex-cathedra decision, it is interesting to turn back the pages of literature to a writer like John Tyndall. One could not question the greatness of Tyndall's work in the realm of experimental science or the keenness of his observation in the domain of natural history, but when he makes excursions into metaphysics and advances theories which end in nescience, when he banishes as absurd the theology of final cause, when he forbids religion to set foot on the region of knowledge, one begins to wonder whether it is not possible for a great mind to be at the same time a single-track mind. Those of us, for example, who believe that the spiritual-

ity of the mind gives it power to reflect on itself can but see the materialist when Tyndall writes: "Man the *object* is separated by an impassable gulf from man the *subject*. There is no motor energy in the human intellect to carry it, without logical rupture, from the one to the other." Then, too, those of us who believe that faith is builded upon man's noblest faculty, reason, and not upon his changing and unreliable emotions, must quarrel with this sincere but mistaken advice. "And grotesque in relation to scientific culture as many of the religions of the world have been and are—dangerous, nay, destructive, to the dearest privileges of freemen as some of them undoubtedly have been, and would, if they could, be again—it will be wise to recognize them as the forms of a force, mischievous, if permitted to intrude on the region of *knowledge,* over which it holds no command, but capable of being guided by liberal thought to noble issues in the region of *emotion,* which is its proper sphere."

Tyndall was an apostle of Darwin, and yet he was too much the native son of the island of saints, scholars, and fairies to be an unfaltering materialist. After a climb to the top of the brooding Matterhorn, during which physical exertion every process of thought was benumbed, he paused to reflect on the "irresistible and remorseless character of those infinitesimal forces, whose integration through the ages pulls down even the Matterhorn," and he was saddened by the fact of inexorable decay. There is, of course, in every mountain the mystery of strength which lures the mind into far-reaching spaces of thought. "This notion of decay,

however, implied a reference to a period when the Matterhorn was in the full strength of mountainhood. My thoughts naturally ran back to its possible growth and origin. Nor did they halt there, but wandered on through molten worlds to that nebulous haze which philosophers have regarded, and with good reason, as the proximate source of all material things. . . . Did that formless fog contain potentially the *sadness* with which I regarded the Matterhorn? Did the *thought* which now ran back to it simply return to its primeval home? If so, had we not better recast our definitions of matter and force? for if life and thought be the very flower of both, any definition which omits life and thought must be inadequate, if not untrue." Then the evolutionist, forgetful that every effect must have an adequate cause and that therefore spirit could not evolve from matter, goes on to think of a possible Creator. "For if the final goal of man has not been yet attained, if his development has not been yet arrested, who can say that such yearnings and questionings are not necessary to the opening of a finer vision, to the budding and the growth of diviner powers? Without this upward force could man have risen to his present height? When I look at the heavens and the earth, at my own body, at my strength and weakness of mind, even at these ponderings, and ask myself, Is there no being or thing in the universe that knows more about these matters than I do?—what is my answer? Supposing our theologic schemes of creation, condemnation, and redemption to be dissipated; and the warmth of denial which they excite, and which, as a motive force, can

match the warmth of affirmation, dissipated at the same time; would the undeflected human mind return to the meridian of absolute neutrality as regards these ultra-physical questions? Is such a position one of stable equilibrium?" These he calls "questions without replies." Yet one needs but refer to the history of man to find the answers. Never has the mind of man been neutral in regard to a superior overlord of creation. Man has worshiped the forces of nature, he has paid homage to graven images of unknown gods, he has even descended to devil-worship, but he has ever believed in a spirit power greater than himself.

John Tyndall was a real Celt in physique and temperament, though he lacked the Irishman's keen appreciation of the humor of things in general and of himself in particular. He was born at Leighlin Bridge, near Carlow, in Ireland, and received his early education in his native town, where was laid the foundation of his fine rhetorical skill. Beginning his career as a teacher and investigator and pursuing his studies both in England and in Germany, he soon became known to the world through his fruitful discoveries in the realm of science and through his brilliant exposition of scientific theories. His interest in glaciers led him to make annual visits to the Alps and resulted in the alluring books *Mountaineering in 1861* and *Hours of Exercise in the Alps*. The proceeds of a lecture tour in the United States were devoted by him to the establishment of scholarships for students of science. His popularity in the university world is evidenced by the fact that, in addition to his original doctorate secured in Germany,

England, the country of his adoption, honored him by degrees from Cambridge and Oxford—and yet Oxford feared him as a teacher of materialism. Edinburgh University, too, saw fit to confer a degree on this scientist who did so much to bring his branch of knowledge within the grasp of the uneducated.

In discussing Tyndall one is always open to the temptation of simply remanding him to the ranks of the despised materialists and thus be done with him. Yet one must be mindful that he never subscribed to what Carlyle calls the "philosophy of mud." There was for him a world of unseen mystery, a world beyond the ken of observed fact and law induced from verified experiment. He had the fervid imagination, the tender heart, the poetic eloquence, and the sense of the spiritual, as well as the arrogant aggressiveness of his race. He was also a man of moods—today a sentimental atheist, tomorrow an imaginative agnostic; now a hard-headed reasoner, now an impractical dreamer. He it was who thought it possible to make "scientific use of the imagination" and, according to Herbert Spencer, succeeded in doing so. The scientist does not usually deal in abstractions, and yet Tyndall writes: "Then there are such things woven into the texture of man as the feelings of awe, reverence, wonder, . . . the love of the beautiful, physical and moral, in Nature, poetry, and art. There is also that deep-set feeling which, since the earliest dawn of history, and probably for ages prior to all history, incorporated itself in the religions of the world. You who have escaped from these religions in the high-and-dry light of the understanding may deride them; but in so doing

you deride accidents of form merely, and fail to touch the immovable basis of the religious sentiment in the emotional nature of man." And finally, driven by a mind which yearns as a pilgrim for a distant home, he wonders if beyond this "still, sad humanity" of ours there is not a spirit power "whose dwelling is the light of setting suns."

Frederick William Faber (1814–1863)

It is given to certain great souls to calm the troubled waters of the spirit, to open the eyes of the spiritually blind, to heal the spiritually sick, to support the morally weak, to comfort the sorrowful, and to furnish the living waters of the fountain of life to all who seek. Father Faber sought and found amid the vicissitudes of life the peace of soul that made of him a refuge for the afflicted in heart. The effect of his writings is best pictured by a metaphor stolen from one of his letters. "Beauty and gloom had striven, and the strife was over. The serpentine mists that were coiling themselves up on the tops of the woods, were symbols of gloom, drawing off his vanquished forces. And beauty seemed to be expanding herself over the lake and even in the pellucid depths, which were of pure and sparkling green. The power of summer afternoon was on the hills. There was that breathing stillness which is the moistened earth's thanksgiving after rain—a Benedicite as thrilling and as tuneful as when the winds are out, and the woods and waterfalls and clamorous caverns are swelling the outbreak of stormy praise. . . . Springs of

old enjoyment broke up within me, and I received into the very recesses of my being the whole scene before me. . . . In silence and deepest gratitude I left the place. It seemed like a message from above, so significant was the intense tranquillity." So significant, indeed, is the intense tranquillity of heart which comes from an hour spent with Father Faber that one can but leave him in silence and in deepest gratitude.

The story of Faber's life, his conversion, and his connection with the Tractarian movement is so much a part of the history of the Church of England as merely to need mention. His hymns are to be found in every hymnal, and his devotional works are the spiritual reading of thousands. An attempt to interpret any phase of his many-sided genius is first of all the difficult work of selection from an abundance of preëlective material. We have been, in this chapter, delving into questions of philosophical import as well as into purely descriptive naturalism, and it will therefore be interesting to quote from Faber concerning the relations of Creator and creature. Of man's creation he writes: "He was part of God's glory, of God's bliss, through all the unrevolving ages of a past eternity. The hanging up in heaven of those multitudes of brilliant worlds, the composition, the adornment, and the equipoise of their ponderous masses, all the marvels of inanimate material creation, all the unexplicable chemistry which is the world's life, were as nothing compared to the intense brooding of heavenly love, the compassionate fulness of divine predestination, over that single soul. Think of that, as he sits among the trees and shrubs,

with the insects and the birds about him! So long as there has been a God, so long has that soul been the object of His knowledge and His love. Ever since the uncreated abyss of almighty love has been spread forth, there lay that soul gleaming on its bright waters. O no wonder God is so patient with sinners, no wonder Jesus died for souls!"

Faber was an incurable optimist, and perhaps this is why he was and is so dear to the sad of heart. "Life and earth and the world abound with joy, even to running over. . . . Joys are thousandfold; we cannot count them; their name is legion. . . . They run out from beneath the throne of God, and electrify millions of souls the world over at the same moment. Our very life is joy, if we will only be honest enough to acknowledge it to God and to ourselves. The unhappiest man on earth has from sunrise to sunset more satisfaction than unhappiness. It is seldom he would even give up his own self and take another, still less forfeit the pleasure of living altogether." But Faber was not blind to facts of sin and sorrow. He simply saw in every grief sent by God the "shade of His hand outstretched caressingly." "What can be more beautiful than the way in which He calculates our weakness, and then measures out our sorrows, and then rains vehement storms of grace upon our fainting wills!" Faber's naturalism sets him at the remotest point from the Puritan ascetic. The stern-visaged preacher of the doctrine that everything which gives pleasure is necessarily wrong will strain a bit over swallowing this thought: "Every sense is an avenue of perpetual pleasure, which, if we will, can raise the mind

to God, and inflame our hearts with love. If we except the irregularities which sin has introduced into the physical world, and which manifestly form no part of the system, the whole of it is simple pleasure and enjoyment, an emanation from the everlasting and inexhaustible gladness of the Most High."

The sheer stupidity of sin was an ever-present fact to Father Faber. "The pleasures of sin are not lasting. The fires go out for want of fuel. . . . Sin is not pleasant to look back upon, as a good action is. It lives in excitement and moral intoxication. Its very vehemence makes it subject to relapses." Sin, however, almost proves an exception to the ethical prohibition against using a bad means to a good end. "Is there any earthly joy like the sense of pardon? How deep it goes down into our nature, unlocking such secret fountains of tears as were far beyond the reach of ordinary hopes and fears! There is also a satisfyingness about it, which seldom accompanies other joys." Is there not something in this which savors of St. Augustine's "O felix culpa"?

Of course it is the Father Faber, poet of the Blessed Sacrament, who is best known and loved. And in this office he is most of all the naturalist, as is He who saw fit to give Himself to us under the accidents of the most common food. Christ always showed in His life with us that grace is founded on nature, though infinitely above nature. The God who made nature and whose glory the heavens were telling was indeed the greatest of naturalists when He walked the ways of man and taught him to consider the lilies of the field. "O how true

it is," writes Faber, "that divine love lives only in excesses! . . . It lays hold of the Creator, and employs the power of God against Himself. . . . A God in a tabernacle of worm-eaten wood! a God in a pyx of some poor metal! a God under a torn and tattered tent! Is this then the adorable Spouse who should set up His Throne in the sun? Is this the Incarnate Wisdom whose palace should be so magnificent and so superb? And behold! He is reduced to an atom, and shrouded with a poor curtain." But the God who made this world so beautiful a place in which to live must go still further in self-abnegation; He must deny Himself all contact of the senses with what can give pleasure. "In the adorable Host He does not see with His man's eyes, nor hear with His man's ears. He restrains all these things, and hushes Himself into a mystical death in order that we may be the more fearless, though not the less reverent, . . . in approaching His mysterious Presence."

Faber considers science simply a manifestation of God. "Inorganic matter and animal life are full of beautiful fitnesses, giving out mute laws which science expresses, as if they were strophes of a hymn to God." But science cannot penetrate "the secret of being alive, the Sanctuary of Life," perhaps because it is "a hiding-place too near" to God. As in the Blessed Sacrament, so in nature: "Everywhere God is veiled; . . . everywhere search is the law of earth and vision the law of heaven: everywhere in this world to believe is to see, and seeing is not believing. This is God's way. It pictures a divine Idea; and it is also, not best only for us, but simply necessary."

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862)

Thoreau gave real meaning and dignity to the overworked phrase "the simple life," for he really "went back to nature." He put into practice the hazy individualistic theories which he imbibed in youth at the fount of Emerson's eloquence. This modern hermit, a native of Concord, Massachusetts, was educated at Harvard. He was, in turn, teacher, lecturer, surveyor, carpenter, tutor for Emerson's children, and pencil-maker. He experienced the sadly frequent fate of literary men, a term in prison. The most notorious thing in his rather uneventful life was his two years' sojourn in the woods. Thoreau was a descendant of explorers, and the love of the wild was in his heart and its call was in his ears. In *Walden* he gives his reasons for obeying this call: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. . . . I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, . . . to drive life into a corner and reduce it to its lowest terms, and if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion."

Thoreau is an ennobler of the commonplace; a telegraph line is for him a harp on which a wind may sob out its memories of far-off woods and mountains. Yet he irritates by his moralizing, by his omnipresence on

the landscape, and by his lapses into fine writing. He indulges in a rather uncertain humor and frequent paradox. There are in his essays, however, occasional bits of real wisdom. His observation "You must have a genius for charity as well as for anything else" is too little understood by most of the aspiring philanthropists.

In style Thoreau desired to carry out his theory of individualism. "My profession," he writes, "is always to be on the alert to find God in nature, to know His lurking places, to attend all the oratorios, the operas in nature. Shall I not have words as fresh as my thought? Shall I use any other man's word?" As a naturalist Thoreau was more the idealist and the mystic than the devotee of pure science. "A fact must be the vehicle of some humanity in order to interest us." He was forever trying to spy out the secrets of nature; and he complains, perhaps justly, "She always retreats as I advance." Thoreau's naturalism is, as Burroughs comments, "the salt that gives him his savor," for it pervades his writings with a something tonic and pungent as the smell of woods in spring.

John Muir (1838–1914)

This tempestuous and mystic nature-lover was a native of Scotland's bonny banks and braes, who came when but eleven years of age to the wilderness of Wisconsin, near the Fox River. His most practical education was received at the university of that state, yet it was education directed by his own interests rather than by the faculty. Then he became a wanderer,

journeying, as he wrote, "away on a glorious botanical and geological excursion, which has lasted nearly fifty years and is not yet completed, always happy and free, poor and rich, without thought of a diploma, of making a name, urged on and on through endless, inspiring, Godful beauty."

Nature was to John Muir indeed a thing of "Godful beauty" and hence, in the truest sense, a joy forever. "No pain here," he writes of Yosemite, "no dull empty hours, no fear of the past, no fear of the future. These blessed mountains are so compactly filled with God's beauty, no petty personal hope or experience has room to be." High on the mountain he lies, "humbly prostrate before the vast display of God's power, and eager to offer self-denial and renunciation with eternal toil to learn any lesson in the divine manuscript." And what lessons he learned from the "divine manuscript" to teach in turn to us! "Stay on this good fire mountain and spend the night among the stars. Watch their glorious bloom until dawn, and get one more baptism of light. Then, with fresh heart, go down to your work, and whatever your fate, under whatever ignorance or knowledge you may afterwards chance to suffer, you will remember these fine, wild views, and look back with joy." The petty littlenesses of life, so hard to bear, are all swept away on the far-traveling mountain winds; while the heart of the man who looks on mountains must needs expand to compass the far countries of the spirit. Muir has immortalized all winds by his essay "A Wind-storm in the Forest." The tender winds that "are advertisements of all they touch, . . . telling their wanderings

even by their scents alone . . . the flowery perfume of land-winds at sea"; the passionate torrential winds that set the trees "rocking and swirling in mad ecstasy"; the winds that "whisper and coo through the branches like a sleepy child,"—all are understood and loved by this poet.

Muir shows his canny Scotch mind in an occasional flash of humor. Of the Mono Indians he writes, "The dirt on their faces was fairly stratified and seemed so ancient in some places and so undisturbed as almost to possess a geological significance." If we love Homer the more because he sometimes nodded, we also welcome the imp of mischief in this mystic.

John Burroughs (1837–1921)

John Burroughs was from childhood familiar with the homely facts of nature. Born on a farm in Roxbury, New York, he passed the time of his boyhood "with farm work in the summer, and with a little study, offset by much hunting and trapping of wild animals in winter." His schooling was meager. "I was born," he writes, "of and among people who neither read books nor cared for them, and my closest associations since have been alien to literature and art." There was, perhaps, more good than evil in this dearth of books and learned companions, for he developed along original lines. When literary men begin to write in early youth they generally produce poetry or fiction. Not so Burroughs; at the age of fourteen he was writing essays modeled on the ponderous style of Johnson, his

earliest literary love. By chance he became acquainted with the essays of Emerson, who, he says, stimulated his religious nature and set him in quest of literary style. To Whitman he attributes his sympathetic sense of the value of man, and to Matthew Arnold his clear thinking. These writers had exercised their influence, and he had passed through the discipline of teaching before he was twenty-seven years of age. Then for nine years he held a position in the Treasury Department at Washington. The eleven years following were occupied with duties as national inspector; and then at last he was able to retire to rural life, which had, during his public career, solaced him with "memories of the birds and of summer fields and woods."

Burroughs is a born naturalist, and he writes "not in the spirit of exact science, but rather with the freedom of love and old acquaintance." He sees and hears far more than mere external sights and sounds. "The very idea of a bird," he writes, "is a symbol and a suggestion to the poet. A bird seems to be at the top of the scale, so vehement and intense is his life,—large-brained, large-lunged, hot, ecstatic, his frame charged with buoyancy and his heart with song." Burroughs loves nature not merely for her own sake but for the aspirations which she creates in him as well. Gifted with the keenest power of observation, he is a most entertaining companion for a stroll, one who is forever pointing out some new delight that would otherwise be lost.

Our concern is not so much with the older Burroughs, the literary critic and the scientist, as it is with the younger Burroughs, the ardent lover of nature, yet

we must speak of his later work because it threatens to overshadow that of his youth. *Under the Apple Trees,* a late work and the embodiment of his ripe philosophical views, shows him to be a disciple of the theory of creative evolution, though he admits that science can never account for the primal gift of life,—the reason why life "once was not here and is here now,"—that it cannot draw the line "between the non-man and the man" and thus find the moment in evolution "when consciousness dawned," and that since the scientific sphere "is not commensurate with the whole of human life," no scientific law can explain why "our house of life has upper stories that look off to the sky and the stars."

Winning, natural, and invigorating in his nature writing, Burroughs displays equal interpretative insight in his literary criticism. He carried out his own ideal of criticism: "A complete criticism will not limit itself to description or to interpretation; it will seek to estimate, to bring out the relative or absolute value of the thing." He then explains the difference between his work as a naturalist and as a critic. "We do not sit in judgment on natural specimens and products except as they stand related to human wants and utilities. . . . Of all artificial things, of all man's works, we are bound to ask, Are they well done? are they what they should be? are they the best of their kind? . . . Art has relations to life, and the critic is bound to consider what these relations are in any given work,—how true, how important; he is examining a human product, not a natural specimen, and is as competent to reject as to

accept; he must compare, weigh, appraise, to the best of his ability." And thus does Burroughs criticize.

Burroughs has made one of the most fitting comments on style: "There is nothing else in the world so sensitive and chameleon-like as language; it takes on at once the hue and quality of the mind that uses it. See how neutral and impersonal, or old and worn and faded the words look in the pages of some writers, then see how drastic or new and individual they become when a mind of another type marshals them into sentences. What vigor and life in them! they seem to have been newly coined since last we met them. It is the test of a writer's real worth—does the language tarnish, as it were, in his hand, or is it brightened and freshened in his use?" There is in the writings of Burroughs this very freshness of language, the clean breath of young April, the vigor of sap-filled trees, and the freedom of all outdoors.

W. H. Hudson (1851–1922)

Fame, that most capricious of all creatures feminine, saw fit to bestow her smile only on the autumn of the life of this splendid old man and writer. Hudson, so lately gone to seek the laurels of the everlasting gardens, left indeed a hidden life in so far as public annals are concerned. Now that the neglectful literary world, not long since awakened to his merits by John Galsworthy's preface to *Green Mansions*, has begun to read his works, it learns from them that he was an Englishman who was born in the pampas of La Plata in South

America; that he spent his boyhood on a ranch; that, impelled by innate desire, he became an ornithologist and general naturalist; that he traveled through South America; and that, at last, with broken health, he went "home" to England to continue the study of his beloved birds and beasts and persons and, best of all, to write about them. To read his *Idle Days in Patagonia* is to understand his remark that his biography ends with his fifteenth year, for he was as much out of his element within four walls as would be any native of his beloved woods.

In the writings of Hudson there is evidenced a close union with nature and an ability to interpret her "various language." He saw in nature the crystal and pristine integrity to the purpose of her creation which awakens in her lover "a strange sense and apprehension of a secret innocence and spirituality" in her. Hudson is indeed the perfect lover who, free from all conventions, goes gypsying with his beloved over the hills and far away, who sees her thousand and one little graces and winning ways to which other eyes are blind, and who sings of them a rollicking song or a tender wind-rocked melody. To him, as to every real nature-lover, every butterfly is a fairy flitting with its burden of honeydew to some far enchanted realm, every flower has the winsome face of a momentarily imprisoned sprite of the woods, and every bird is a baby angel who slipped through the star-wicket of heaven to trill its runaway song to man. It seems that his muse must be, too, some imprisoned woodland nymph, wistful-eyed but with rainbow glints on its rebellious wings.

Hudson's collection of essays, *The Book of a Naturalist*, once for all established his place among the writers of this school. There is one especially entertaining and yet didactic essay which contains a story about a squirrel who, like many discontented humans, thought he could find happiness only away from home, and who, like them, learned by suffering that contentment with what one possesses is the only means to happiness. The tender intimacy of this essay, so appealing to children, pervades most of Hudson's writings. He has the believing heart of a child and yet the wisdom of experience. "Earthly excellence," he writes, "can come in no other way but one, and the ending of passion and strife is the beginning of decay. It is indeed a hard saying and the hardest lesson we can learn of Nature without losing love and bidding good-bye forever to hope."

In his preface to *Green Mansions* John Galsworthy tells us that Hudson is the greatest English writer of the day, and that as a stylist he has few if any equals. Whether we agree with him or not, we must admit that Hudson possesses a crystal style, that his language is as the lens through which we see into his mind and heart. His sense of beauty, which he calls "God's best gift to the human soul," safeguards his expression of the beautiful. His vision penetrates beyond the mere external, and he joys in the "sense of beautiful human things hidden from sight among the masses of foliage." His imagination is, however, selective rather than creative, and is most manifested in his process of choosing and recombining important details. There is nothing of

photographic realism in his descriptive writing, for he is careful to omit the trivial and superfluous. Like most lovers of nature Hudson can but philosophize in the face of nature, can but seek beyond her for a something greater. Yet one cannot be certain which he is seeking, a nature god or the God of nature.

Charles William Beebe (1877–)

Some years ago the New York Zoölogical Society established a tropical-research station in Demerara and placed in charge of it Charles William Beebe, a scientist ardently in love with his work, illuminative of vision, keenly interpretative in the light of extensive knowledge, and gifted with a graceful, picturesque literary style. Beebe is a man of wide experience, for he has not only carried on his investigations in various tropical lands but had as well opportunity to spend a year and a half in intimate study of the wild pheasants of Asia. Impressed with the idea that ornithologists and zoölogists in the past have devoted themselves too entirely to mere cataloguing of species and collection of skins, he set himself to the study of the lives of birds and animals in their natural surroundings. Hence from Demerara, made the classic hunting-ground for naturalists by Waterton, who chronicled his experiences in his *Wanderings*, Beebe has been sending to the scientific societies and to readers of magazines instructive and pleasurable accounts of the wild life there.

Beebe has an insight into people as well as into birds and animals, an insight revealed particularly in the

essay "Pagan Personalities." "The Dyaks are simple, outspoken, wholly savage—that is, savage in the best meaning of the word. They have not been open to outside influences, or have resisted whatever pressure has been brought to bear. And they are undeveloped, uncivilized, loyal to the ideals which served the generations before them. These things have combined to make them both splendid and naïve; and this naïveté, this unsophistication, is only the more remarkable when placed side by side with their great mental quickness and receptivity, for they never fail to appraise a situation or a personality at an instant's notice; and they are resourceful, tactful, and courteous in dealing with whatever events may ensue. . . . However, they act always on impulse, from instinct. They have no civilized ideals and conventions. They have their own laws of conduct and morality as well as their customs." Beebe's intimate understanding of the various peoples with whom he lived during his naturalistic expeditions is all the more remarkable because, being so much concerned with his real work, he had so little time to devote to study of them. He indulges in an occasional bit of philosophy, such as, "Life moves swiftly and inevitably, with no sentimental repetition of its successes or its failures." But his real work in literature is not so much philosophical reflection on nature as it is description and exposition of her processes and her beauties.

One might select a hundred paragraphs to illustrate both Beebe's descriptive power and his finished style. There is, of course, something especially luring in a tropical night, with its "cool, velvet touch"; nor does

he fail to portray its charm. "Whether dark rich olive under crescent or starlight, or gleaming silver-gray in the flood of the full moon, the forest, so quiet, so motionless all about me, was always mysterious, always alluring. To the north, at the foot of the hill, lay the dark surface of the great river, its waters one amber, homogeneous flood, yet drawn from a thousand tributaries: hidden creeks seeping through mossy jungles far beyond the Spanish border, brown cascades filtering through gravel which gleamed with yellow gold and sparkled with the light from uncut diamonds. And to the south rose the wall of the jungle itself, symbol of all that is wild and untamed in nature." Occasionally this entertaining naturalist lapses into the frolicsome style, as in that piquant essay "Hammock Nights." Is there not the flavor of Lamb in this? "The god of hammocks is unfailingly kind, just, and generous to those who have found pancakes wanting and have discovered by inspiration, or what-not, that truffles do not grow in backyards. . . . Which proves, I believe, that a mere bed may be a block in the path of philosophy, a commonplace, and that truffles and hammocks—hammocks unquestionably—are twin doors to the land of romance."

Jean Henri Fabre (1823–1915)

This amazing and monumental naturalist writes prose so virile and yet so sweetly winning in its simplicity that it endures without perceptible loss of quality the deteriorating effects usually attendant on translation, however skillful and sympathetic it be. Fabre, whose

works were but lately brought overseas by the glorious pen of Alexander Teixeira de Mattos, was born at Saint-Léons, Aveyron, and was, unwittingly no doubt, introduced by a friendly curate to his life work on the occasion of boyishly stealing a bird's egg from its nest. Fabre's schooling was, according to modern standards, most insufficient, and yet he became an efficient teacher, and professor of natural philosophy, first at the Lycée of Ajaccio and later at the Lycée of Avignon. "Of scientific education," he writes in the book *The Life of the Fly,* "the fruit of college training, I have none whatsoever. I never set foot in a lecture hall except to undergo the ordeal of examinations. Without masters, without guides, often without books, in spite of poverty, that terrible extinguisher, I went ahead, persisted, facing my difficulties, until the indomitable bump ended by shedding its scanty contents. I was a born animalist. Why and how? No reply." These difficulties of Fabre beset him till his last years, when the French government saw fit to honor itself by conferring on him a modest pension. Not until he was sixty years of age was he able to realize the dream of his life by the purchase of a bit of land near Sérignan, Vaucluse, where he carried on his investigations and wrote his masterpieces among naturalistic writings.

Fabre possesses the charm of an inimitable simplicity, half natural, half artistic cleverness. "In conversing with animals," he claims, "language loses nothing by remaining juvenile. It is the right way for the simple to understand one another." Fabre does indeed converse *with* his pets—and what lover of ani-

mals does not do so? His expositions of scientific discoveries are conversational in manner. With charming naïveté and endearing intimacy he invites the reader to draw his chair up to the miscroscope and "see how it happens," and when one has been avidly learning, for example, the why of the glowworm's glow, he is suddenly halted by the well-nigh indefatigable old man's "My hand is not so steady nor my sight so good as formerly"—and a sudden mist of tears blurs the page. There is something in Fabre's writing which sends one's thoughts homing to the tender saint of old Assisi and his "little brothers the birds."

Fabre is not only a great scientist; he is a great Christian as well. Yet he won the whole-souled admiration of Darwin, who named him "the incomparable observer," and from Maeterlinck—whose burned-out lamp of faith in *La Mort de Tintagiles* symbolizes the spirit of all his writings—the tribute, "Fabre is one of the most profound and inventive scholars, and also one of the purest writers, and, I was going to add, one of the finest poets of the century that has just passed." Fabre is indeed "the scientist with the poet's heart," aptly named "the Insects' Homer" in a poem by John Pearson. He saw rather than reasoned—and in this is he not most of all the poet?—the existence of God as the necessary cause of creation; he saw "the universal harmony of things" proclaiming divine Wisdom expressed in order. "Le Pilote Souverain" was everywhere evident to him.

This fascinating naturalist occasionally steals a bit of time from his beloved insects to have a fling at cer-

tain philosophical vagaries. To the casuists he writes concerning instincts: "If the favorable event is a purely accidental result, how many combinations would be needed to bring it about, how much time to exhaust all the possible cases? When the difficulty becomes too pressing, you take refuge behind the mist of the ages; you retreat into the shadows of the past as far as fancy can carry you; you call upon time, that factor of which we have so little at our disposal and which, for this very reason, is so well-suited to hide our illusions. Here you can let yourselves go and lavish the centuries. . . . When I am driven to appeal to infinity in time, I am very much afraid of running up against absurdity." In confronting the phenonema of animal instinct Fabre could but be humbled at the thought of the infinite and painstaking wisdom behind its marvelous manifestations. "To know everything and to know nothing, according as it acts under normal or exceptional conditions: that is the strange antithesis presented by the insect race." Again: "One would think that insects had something more subtle than mere remembrance, a kind of intuition for places to which we have nothing similar, in short, an indefinable faculty which I call memory, failing any other expression to denote it. There can be no name for the unknown."

In all the writings of this admirably unique naturalist there is the sweetly vibrant undertone of faith; of love of abstract beauty finding expression in the concrete lovelinesses of nature, for in every filigreed wing he saw the whimsical tenderness of One who had tired of fashioning planets and suns.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Some works of interest in connection with the introductory matter in this chapter are *Naturalism in England*, Vol. IV of Georg Brandes's series *Main Currents in Nineteenth-Century Literature*; Orestes A. Brownson's *Works*, Vol. IX, *Scientific Theories*; the chapters on naturalism in Stuart Pratt Sherman's treatise *On Contemporary Literature*; the article in the *Catholic Encyclopædia*, "Science and the Church," by J. G. Hagen; "Christianity and Physical Science," from Newman's *Idea of a University*; "Agnosticism," from the essays of J. L. Spalding; *Philosophy of Literature*, by Brother Azarias; the article in *The Month* for December, 1922, by A. L. Cortie, "Does Revelation fetter Science?" One might add to the naturalists here considered: John C. Van Dyke, for his *Nature for its Own Sake*; Henry van Dyke, for his *Fisherman's Luck*; Hamilton Wright Mabie, for his *Under the Trees and Elsewhere*; Charles Warren Stoddard, for his *South Sea Idylls*; William Hamilton Gibson, Charles Conrad Abbott, Olive Thorne Miller, Bradford Torrey, Florence M. Bailey, and Frank Bolles.

CHAPTER IX

THE FAMILIAR ESSAY

Myselfe am the groundworke of my booke.— MONTAIGNE

BACKGROUND

Fairy lore relates that the dear and gracious familiar essay, daughter of Lord Michel de Montaigne, into whose ear she whispered naïve inspiration while she guided in writing his clumsy hand by her own dainty one, was afflicted by such grief on the occasion of her father's death that she fell into a trance. Her slumber lasted through centuries. And many were the knights from the fine old literary families in various countries who journeyed to la belle France and tried to awaken the sleeping maiden. Sometimes a knight would so nearly succeed that she smiled and stirred in her sleep, and the knight would depart empowered by her spirit to wield his pen valiantly. Finally, as the fairy tale goes, came the prince of the maimed body and of the beautiful soul, at whose touch she awakened to give him all her graces and her lovely self. What a different world from that she had known in her father's day now greeted her eager eyes!

To describe the social life of the nineteenth century would require the proportions of a volume. Perhaps

we may justifiably term the great political upheavals, the leveling of class distinctions, the emancipation of slaves, the struggle for freedom of the seas, as the labor of the world at the birth of liberty. In the England of Charles Lamb oppression was reduced to system, and it is easy to imagine the influence of this unpleasant state of affairs on the writers of the day who, becoming either "reactionary supporters" of existing conditions or emancipators, made their literary influence felt in political matters. The ideal of liberty was kept ever before the public, and the dignity of the common man was brought home to him and to his oppressor. Romanticism in literature, truly the handmaiden to democracy, bridged over the chasm between the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the English Reform Bill of 1852; romanticism gone mad led the French revolutionists; romanticism wove its messages into the flames of the fire before which Lincoln dreamed the dreams of his young manhood; romanticism—if this is not saying too much—led us into the World War. Through the whole of the last century romanticism has been warning us that the hills must be laid low and the valleys filled up, for democracy is now to draw all things after her as she walks across the world.

We must bear in mind, however, that the nineteenth century, despite its struggles, was a period of material well-being in England. There was a leisured class who enjoyed literature and encouraged literary production; England was rich in an unequaled literary heritage from the great writers of the eighteenth century; education had become widespread among the masses; there

was much to think about and write about—and thus the times were indeed ripe for the coming of the latest and most dear of all literary forms, the irrepressible, irresponsible, most highly endowed familiar essay.

Definition

The familiar essayist is a veritable Jaques upon a mossy bank, who, while he watches the world go jostling its way down the river of life, extracts from its seemingly confused and meaningless tumbling bits of loving wisdom and quaint chuckles of fun, holds out his hands to catch the rainbow sprays of charity that rise from its journeying, drinks into his heart the world's grief and sweetens the bitterness of its sorrow, and then makes the whole into a tender little monologue-essay which he gives back to the world to soothe the pains of its tired travel. Every beggared hope and little way-worn dream comes unashamed to ask his help, for he is very wise and tender; and when it has gone back refreshed to the heart in which it was born, lo, its spirit is immortalized in his essay. Indulging sentiment and fancy without restraint, now whimsical, now grave, now melancholy, he plays with his subject; he is, in turn, grotesque, eloquent, pathetic; always a bit boyish in his love of living, in his quick sense of the ridiculous, he is very much a humorist, a real fun-maker. Writing his monologue with perfect freedom, he is intimately personal, and in the constant revelation of himself lies his charm. Very often he relates his own experiences, analyzes himself, and makes confessions, taking advantage of the fact that there are three universally

interesting subjects, "I," and "you," and "the other person." He says to the unsuspecting reader, "I want to confide in you," and is immediately sure of sympathetic understanding. Then he talks about the problems of life, and the reader is piqued into self-complacency because he is sure that he could advise the essayist if the two of them could but meet in person. Or perhaps the essayist is a discoverer of the commonplace: everybody rides on trains, lies in bed of mornings, wears a nose which he guards tenderly though he has not chosen its shape, takes "Saturday-night baths." To these common things he gives side-splitting, rejuvenating immortality in single short essays. Then, with what lyric ecstasy can the familiar essayist speak nature's "various language." Finally, he may express to his reader some general observations and opinions, perhaps asking him to consider old ideas from a new angle. The familiar essay is the most charming vehicle in which fun may ride, for its author laughs with his reader, never at him. His humor is the sympathetic perception of those ridiculous and pathetic incongruities which are such a necessary part of life. We observed that there is but one requirement for the literary essayist, the gift of style, and the observation applies here: style is the man; the man is the essayist; the essayist at work is the embodiment of all our kind, sweet humanness. With all the resources of narration and description at his disposal, with liberties not permitted to other writers, he must yet keep some central idea to unify his writing, some golden thread to guide him through the labyrinthine ways of fancy. This is his one restriction.

Charles Lamb (1775–1834)

The prince of the beautiful soul who braved the dragons of objectivity and pseudo-classic restraint to enter the literary stronghold where the lovely daughter of Montaigne lay in her long sleep, and whose loving caress brought her back to the needy world, was born in the workaday city of London. After attending Christ's Hospital charity school Lamb was appointed clerk in the South Sea House and later in the East India Company. The gift of human sympathy is given in full measure only to those who have suffered, and Lamb was the closest of sorrow's friends. To his sister Mary, who in insanity killed their mother in his presence, he gave the tenderest care all her days. He was very poor, and his selfish brother would not help to care for the family. His love for Ann Simmons was so great that when she married another man Lamb had to be confined for a short time in an asylum. Physically he was an affliction to himself, being of under size and the victim of a miserable habit of stuttering. To know these things in the light of Lamb as a writer is to reverence him. With his glorious pen he kept ever at bay the pursuing dogs of loneliness and sorrow; and the miracle of his bravery makes us marvel the more when we recall that he for whom every day prepared some new sorrow rose early every morning to write jokes for the newspaper. Sunshine and shadow fought for the soul of Lamb, and sunshine was victorious.

Humor is the essence of Lamb, and its kindliness softened his every attack upon the weaknesses or posi-

tive vices of others. He who conjured up the immortal Alice, the womanly woman of "Dream-Children," said of the wearing of short dresses and pink stockings, "Modesty taking her final leave of mortals, her last Blush was visible in her ascent to the heavens by the tract of her glowing instep." He whose sympathy was strong enough to see how, on Valentine's Day, "The weary and all forespent twopenny postman sinks beneath a load of delicate embarrassments, not his own," never yielded to the embarrassment of his habit of stuttering but, instead, turned it into a conversational accomplishment. "That stammer," observes De Quincey, "was worth an annuity to him as an ally of his wit. Firing under cover of that advantage, he did triple execution; for, in the first place, the distressing sympathy of the hearers with *his* distress of utterance won for him the silence of deep attention; and then, whilst he had us all hoaxed into this attitude of mute suspense by an appearance of distress that he perhaps did not really feel, down came the plunging shot into the very thick of us, with ten times the effect it would else have had." Once when Wordsworth was expressing a rather condescending opinion of Shakespeare, Lamb interrupted him: "Here's Wordsworth, he says he could have written *Hamlet* himself, if he had only had the m-m-m-mind!" This stroke reminds us of Professor Winchester's comment on Lamb: "Just because life was to him so serious a matter, he took delight in upsetting those people who are always mistaking stupidity for seriousness and dulness for dignity." Carlyle thought Lamb's talk "contemptibly small," indicating wondrous

ignorance and shallowness. Hazlitt was impressed otherwise: "Lamb often had wiser things to say than he would utter, but, fearing perhaps that he might go beyond the apprehension of certain of the company and make them uncomfortable, he preferred to maintain a lower and friendlier level by indulging in nonsense."

Lamb the essayist is Lamb the man, "rich in all that makes life valuable or memory sweet." We know everyone he knew and we love everyone he loved. Though he never married, because he knew of the taint in his blood, no writer has given more exquisite pictures of home and fatherhood. How stupid seems the appellation of the term "jester" to him who laughed that he might not weep. Perhaps the greatest of all his qualities is wisdom, a real wisdom hidden under playfulness, a very genius of common sense which makes him uniformly right. Lamb knew himself, and hence he had an understanding sympathy for others. "On the Genius and Character of Hogarth," "A Quakers' Meeting," "The Old and the New Schoolmaster," all manifest wide comprehension of his fellow men. His gentle kindliness is shown in "Grace before Meat," "The Praise of Chimney Sweepers," and "Captain Jackson." "When a kindly face greets us, though but passing by, and never knows us again, nor we it, we should feel it an obligation." If this be true, and it surely is, what shall we say of our obligation to its kindly author who has left the whole of his dear self to abide with us as long as the written word will last. His tenderness journeyed into every walk of life and sought out its remotest corners. In "Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading" is shown

his love of every poor human creature. "How beautiful to a genuine lover of reading are the sullied leaves, and worn-out appearance, nay, the very odour (beyond Russia), if we would not forget kind feelings in fastidiousness, of an old 'Circulating Library' Tom Jones, or Vicar of Wakefield! How they speak of the thousand thumbs that have turned over their pages with delight! —of the lone sempstress whom they may have cheered . . . after her long day's needle-toil, running far into midnight, when she has snatched an hour, ill-spared from sleep, to steep her cares, as in some Lethean cup, in spelling out their enchanting contents! Who would have them a whit less soiled? What better condition could we desire to see them in?" We wonder in what Lethean cup Lamb steeped his own cares while he prepared for us the story of his life, for the bitterness that must have flavored most of his memories finds no place in his entrancing autobiographical writings, which are very confidential in their revelations of his life. "Mackery End" and "Blakesmoor" tell us of his childhood; "Recollections of Christ's Hospital" gives us an adequate picture of his schooldays; "The South-Sea House" and "The Superannuated Man" recount his days with the East India Company; "Newspapers Thirty-five Years Ago" records his early literary experience; and "New Year's Eve" shows him to us in his old age. "I begin to count the probabilities of my duration, and to grudge at the expenditure of moments and shortest periods, like miser's farthings. . . . I am not content to pass away 'like a weaver's shuttle.' . . . I am in love with this green earth; the face of town and country; the un-

speakable rural solitudes, and the sweet security of streets. . . . I do not want to . . . drop, like mellow fruit, as they say, into the grave." We may marvel that Lamb so loved the life which had dealt cruelly with him; and we may well rejoice that he did love it, for he kept on telling us how lovely life can be if we but make it so, till death who had so much to offer him grew jealous and snatched him from the world he held so dear, and made so dear because he lived in it.

Lamb's style is himself, in its quaint humor, its old-fashioned words and antique phrases, and its whimsical metaphors, all bundled together in such strange fashion that harmony is the result of their very confusion. His ridiculous fooling is the prelude to his sincerest wisdom, as is shown in the really excellent essay on music, which begins: "I have no ear.—Mistake me not, reader—nor imagine that I am by nature destitute of those exterior twin appendages, hanging ornaments, and (architecturally speaking) handsome volutes to the human capital. Better my mother had never borne me. I am, I think, rather delicately than copiously provided with those conduits; and I feel no disposition to envy the mule for his plenty, or the mole for her exactness, in those ingenious labyrinthine inlets—those indispensable side-intelligencers." And how we sympathize with him when he confesses: "I even think that *sentimentally* I am disposed to harmony. But *organically* I am incapable of a tune. I have been practicing '*God save the King*' all my life; whistling and humming of it over to myself in solitary corners; and am not yet arrived, they tell me, within many quavers of it." Dreams of super-

human loveliness came to Lamb. His "Child Angel" makes us think of him. "And it could not taste of death, by reason of its adoption into immortal palaces; but it was to know weakness, and reliance, and the shadow of human imbecility; and it went with a lame gait; but in its goings it exceeded all mortal children in grace and swiftness. . . . But, by reason that Mature Humanity is too gross to breathe the air of that supersubtile region, its portion was, and is, to be a child forever. . . . And myriads of years rolled round (in dreams Time is nothing), and still it kept, and is to keep, perpetual childhood, and is the Tutelar Genius of childhood upon earth, and still goes lame and lovely." "Dream-Children: A Reverie," "The Praise of Chimney Sweepers," and "Poor Relations," along with that delirious farce "A Dissertation on Roast Pig," are literary treasures too sacred for our hands. There is but one thing to say: if you are unfortunate enough not to have read these, do so before the sun goes down, and feed your unknowing heart with that most wholesome nourishment, dear, loving, human Lamb, and, above all, do not forget to say your "Grace before Meat." Pardon the pun, dear reader. We blundered into it and would have expunged it, but we were arrested by the unexpected chuckle of a little thin man, dressed in old-world black clothes, who on the instant came tottering and shuffling into the room. His eyes shone with their tear-dimmed smile as he reminded us in his inimitable stuttering fashion, "I should like my last breath to be drawn through a pipe and exhaled in a p-p-p-pun!"

John Ruskin (1819–1900)

Ruskin is better known to us from his writings than from the many contradictory things that have been said concerning him, because his writings are, indeed, himself. They give us clear knowledge of his personal history and opinions, of his way of living, and of his inmost soul. We learn that he had the intense personality of genius that excuses eccentricity of manner; and yet his friends tell us that the sweetness, gentleness, genial frankness, and sympathy of Ruskin were no less perennial than his blue neckcloth. Ruskin's father was a London wine merchant whose good fortune afforded him leisure to enjoy worth-while books and pictures. The boyhood of the future writer is best set forth in his *Praeterita*. He received his early education from private tutors, and the fact that he was compelled to read the Bible daily and to memorize long passages from it probably accounts for his impassioned and meaningful style. He spent some time at Oxford, and while there showed signs of the ill health which made of him a wanderer and which in later life undermined his mental powers. His last years were sad because of the many bitter attacks of his enemies, his unhappy marriage, and the seeming failure of much of his work.

There can be no question as to the richness of Ruskin's knowledge; no one could write so prolifically and yet be always talking about something worth while unless he had vast mental stores from which to draw. Sufficiently sure of himself, he pronounces his critical judgments so fearlessly that he has often been accused

of egoism; and yet he was modest, diffident, and unusually submissive in his personal contact with others. He is ever most candid in acknowledging his indebtedness to other writers, especially Kenelm Henry Digby, to whose book *The Broad Stone of Honour* he pays tribute in *Modern Painters*. The reader is assured that he "will find every phase of nobleness illustrated" in this volume, and Ruskin adds, "The best help I have ever had—so far as help depended on the sympathy of others in work which, year after year, it was necessary to pursue through the abuse of the brutal and the base—was given me, when this author, from whom I had first learned to love nobleness, introduced frequent reference to my own writings in his 'Children's Bower.'"

Modern Painters is, without doubt, the finest example of a literary bone of contention. As to its literary art, the growling critics at their bone must at least growl a united pean, for it is at the zenith of the aspirations of prose. Never did canvas set forth scenes more beautiful than its word-pictures. Never did Turner or Tintoret surpass with a brush the wonders wrought by the pen of their chief extoller. And for his essays in literary criticism, too, the shades of Dante, Chaucer, and Shakespeare may well bow to the shade of one whose prose poems in appreciation of them are as priceless gems to brocade. Why, then, is Ruskin criticized so adversely? Perhaps for his magisterial manner—yet he is a teacher to be loved. Perhaps for his philosophy—yet is he a philosopher, or only a poet with a burning heart? If he is a philosopher, then he must be classified. There are but three possible distinct philosophies

of life and of art—the materialistic, the idealistic, and the humanistic. The philosophy of Ruskin's day, especially economic philosophy, was a sort of materialistic determinism; and against it, along with the prosaic realism of certain old Dutch masters, he hurled his anathemas. On the other hand, he was equally opposed to the pure idealist, for whom the world has no objective existence and for whom it lives only in the sensations and mind of man, the idealist such as Millais, George Inness, and Corot. Ruskin was simply a humanist, a true realist who studied nature as an objective reality having its proper effect of beauty on the human mind, but who never forgot that spirit is above matter. Hence Ruskin is most important to the early history of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. One would search in vain the pages of Ruskin for a definite, connected system of philosophy. His psychology in the second book is confusingly contradictory to that in the first, and his metaphysical vocabulary is uncertain. "He was not really a philosopher but a poet, and although poets make mistakes, their intuitions are generally correct. And while the æsthetic movement in England was not altogether dependent upon Ruskin, he remains its first parent." Ruskin's part in the Pre-Raphaelite movement is thus aptly put by George N. Shuster in his admirable book *The Catholic Spirit in Modern English Literature*—a book, which, without unduly figurative classification, may be called the voice of one crying in the wilderness, and which, in the manner of all precursors, has not only won disciples but has also aroused a veritable tempest in a few teapot minds.

Paradox and eloquence that rise to the height of impassioned prose are the two paramount characteristics of Ruskin's style. "Why should we wear mourning for the guests of God!" "The path of a good woman is indeed strewn with flowers: but they rise behind her steps, not before them." "The loftiest and purest love too often does but inflame the cloud of life with endless fire of pain." Are these sentences mere prose, or are they molten metal of language poured into eternal molds?

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894)

Cradled at birth by the banks and braes of bonny Scotland and laid to rest on a mountain top in the Samoan wilderness; naturalized in romance by the very atmosphere of his native Edinburgh; drinking deep drafts from the fount of a fine home library; carrying ever with him two books, one to read and one to write in, and by this love of books winning from his teachers at Edinburgh the opprobrious titles of "idler" and "truant"; engineer; lawyer; steerage emigrant to the United States on a matrimonial adventure; traveler through the romantic seas and islands of the south; indefatigable novelist, short-story writer, and essayist, despite the ravages of disease; heroic in the face of poverty; "apostle of all noble childlikeness"—Stevenson wielded the mightiest of the pens that have been devoted to the service of style. This "sedulous ape" was one of the few writers who can devote themselves perseveringly to a systematic and laborious study of

literary technique, who can look upon everything as material for literature, and yet not become insufferable prigs. Never was there a writer who worked harder than Stevenson, yet there is a spontaneous flow, an easy grace of structure in his prose that is the despair of all imitators. His positive philosophy—the *thou shalt* rather than the *thou shalt not*—was the philosophy of Stevenson the man as well as of Stevenson the writer. Hating "comfortable, well-fed, self-complacent materialism" with an implacable hatred, beating himself in vain against the walls of Victorian conventions, Stevenson was forced to turn to romance to find relief for the great needs of his soul. The miracle of this brave-hearted Scotchman is that while he was strong enough to drag the shackles of sickness with him in his onward struggle rather than lie down within them, he could admire the easy heroism of the strong and well.

Stevenson is not only a great stylist, he is also a great critic, whose critical writing, informal and personal in manner and philosophical in matter, gives us the perfect essay in literary criticism, such an essay as "A Gossip on Romance." "A friend of mine, a Welsh blacksmith, was twenty-five years old and could neither read nor write, when he heard a chapter of *Robinson* read aloud in a farm kitchen. Up to that moment he had sat content, huddled in his ignorance, but he left that farm another man. There were day-dreams, it appeared, divine day-dreams, written and printed and bound, and to be bought for money and enjoyed at pleasure." The basic principles of criticism are perennial truths, of a far-reaching importance not perceived

by those who insist upon mere truth to facts. Stevenson judges in the light of these principles. "All representative art, which can be said to live, is both realistic and ideal; and the realism about which we quarrel is a matter purely of externals. It is no especial cultus of nature and veracity, but a mere whim of veering fashion, that has made us turn our back upon the larger, more various, and more romantic art of yore. A photographic exactitude in dialogue is now the exclusive fashion. . . . Yet truth to the conditions of man's nature and the conditions of man's life, the truth of literary art, is free of the ages." In the same essay from which these sentences are taken, "A Note on Realism," Stevenson shows us his mastery of figurative language. "A work of art is first cloudily conceived in the mind; during the period of gestation it stands more clearly forward from these swaddling mists, puts on expressive lineaments, and becomes at length that most faultless, but also, alas! that incommunicable product of the human mind, a perfect design. On the approach to execution all is changed. The artist must now step down, don his working clothes, and become the artisan. He now resolutely commits his airy conception, his delicate Ariel, to the touch of matter; he must decide, almost in a breath, the scale, the spirit, and the particularity of execution of his whole design."

Stevenson was convinced that the writer has a moral as well as a purely literary duty. His interpretation of the word "moral" seems to be truth to one's convictions, whether right or wrong. "Man is imperfect; yet, in his literature, he must express himself and his own

views and preferences; for to do anything else is to do a far more perilous thing than to risk being immoral: it is to be sure of being untrue. To ape a sentiment, even a good one, is to travesty a sentiment; that will not be helpful. To conceal a sentiment, if you are sure you hold it, is to take a liberty with truth. . . . There is a time to dance and a time to mourn; to be harsh as well as to be sentimental; to be ascetic as well as to glorify the appetites; and if a man were to combine all these extremes into his work, each in its place and proportion, that work would be the world's masterpiece of morality as well as of art. Partiality is immorality; for any book is wrong that gives a misleading picture of the world and life."

Stevenson's Christianity seems to have been simply humanitarian, to have been measured by his conception of Christ's human work in the world. "Christ was always such a great gentleman; you can always count on his doing the right thing." He showed his impatience with the "selfish and egoistical Christian" when he remarked once to an anxious lady who had confided in him: "Think a little more of other people's souls and less of your own. I am sure Christ never intended you to concentrate all your thoughts on yourself." Perhaps this bit of philosophy was the source of Stevenson's immeasurable tolerance for the frailties of others.

It would seem essential to a literary study of the essay to quote from Stevenson's essay on style, but since it is so perfect a unit we shall leave the reader to read it as a whole and thus to appreciate it duly. It is almost the last word on the subject. All the types of prose com-

position find admirable illustration in his essays, his descriptive power being especially noteworthy. "The wind among the trees was my lullaby. Sometimes it sounded for minutes together with a steady even rush, not rising nor abating; and again it would swell and burst like a great crashing breaker, and the trees would patter me all over with big drops from the rain of the afternoon." Many single sentences of Stevenson are in themselves small poems. "The world was flooded with a blue light, the mother of the dawn." "The golden specks of autumn in the birches tossed shiveringly." This great lover of nature is shown at his best in "A Night among the Pines," a veritable lyric in prose. The sweet philosophy of cheerfulness that pervades all his writings often makes him pause to give it concrete expression. "How the world gives and takes away, and brings sweethearts near, only to separate them again into distant and strange lands; but to love is the great amulet which makes the world a garden; and 'hope, which comes to all,' outwears the accidents of life, and reaches with tremulous hand beyond the grave and death. Easy to say: yea, but also, by God's mercy, both easy and grateful to believe!" We cannot wonder that Stevenson finds his way into hearts which have been touched by sorrow, that he is a most welcome guest in the homes of the hardworking poor, that he moistens the eyes of the sternest puritan with the tears of sympathy with joy and sorrow, that he brings to the most abandoned outcast a sweet hope in the forgiving kindness of his fellow men. The persevering cheerfulness of Stevenson —dear, lovable "Don Quixote," as he called himself—

awakens in us a feeling of pathos that lies too deep for tears; and after we have put down the book the music of his writing lingers in our hearts as the poignant sweetness of some lovely, half-forgotten melody freighted with homesick longing for its own celestial country.

George Gissing (1857–1903)

Coming before the world in the character of Henry Ryecroft, Gissing wrote for his volume of that title a preface which, like the book itself, has some of the flavor of Montaigne. "I suspect that, in his happy leisure," writes Ryecroft, "there grew upon him a desire to write one more book, a book which should be written merely for his own satisfaction. Plainly, it would have been the best he had it in him to do. But he seems never to have attempted the arrangement of these fragmentary pieces, and probably because he could not decide upon the form they should take. I imagine him shrinking from the thought of a first-person volume; he would feel it too pretentious; he would bid himself wait for the day of riper wisdom. And so the pen fell from his hand." This production in one way ranks its author with Montaigne, Stevenson, and Lamb, for the fact of personality expressed in the Frenchman's "Myselfe am the grounde-worke of my booke" is also the foundation whereon these later disciples based their meditations and revelations. In addition to a good education at Owen's College, Gissing was well trained in the school of life by many self-made difficulties. His hard life taught him the value of time. "Time is money—says the vulgarest

saw known to any age or people. Turn it round about, and you get a precious truth—money is time. . . . What are we doing all our lives but purchasing, or trying to purchase, time? And most of us, having grasped it with one hand, throw it away with the other." Still this wearied man of the city streets craved the quiet of the country. "Every morning when I awake, I thank heaven for silence. This is my orison. I remember the London days when sleep was broken by clash and clang, by roar and shriek, and when my first sense on returning to consciousness was hatred of the life about me. Noises of wood and metal, clattering of wheels, banging of implements, jangling of bells—all such things are bad enough, but worse still is the clamorous human voice. . . . But there is the rustle of branches in the morning breeze; there is the music of a sunny shower against the window; there is the matin song of birds. Several times lately I have lain wakeful when there sounded the first note of the earliest lark; it makes me almost glad of my restless nights. The only trouble that touches me in these moments is the thought of my long life wasted amid the senseless noises of man's world. . . . As it is, I enjoy with something of sadness, remembering that this melodious silence is but the prelude of that deeper stillness which waits to enfold us all."

Along with all the other pleasant confidences in this book, Gissing lets us know that he is very much the artist; above all, the individualistic artist. He defines art as "an expression, satisfying and abiding, of the zest of life." Of course this zest of life must be a very personal thing, or the artist will not come into being.

Gissing pokes pleasant fun at those who pity him in his retirement. What folly to think that he who "would never again hear the utterance of a human tongue, save from those few who are dear" to him, could be lonely. He tells us also that he cordially hates democracy as "full of menace to all the finer hopes of civilization." Most of us are of course more optimistic about the rule of the many.

Gissing's monograph "Charles Dickens" shows him no mean critic. "*Bleak House* (1853) is constructed only too well. Here Dickens applied himself laboriously to the perfecting of that kind of story he had always had in view, and produced a fine example of theatrical plot. One cannot say, in this case, that the intrigue refuses to be remembered; it is a puzzle, yet ingeniously simple; the parts fitting together very neatly indeed. So neatly, that poor untidy Life disclaims all connection with these doings, however willingly she may recognize for her children a score or so of the actors. . . . The story is child's play compared with many invented, for instance, by Wilkie Collins; but in combination with Dickens's genuine powers, it produces its designed effect; we move in a world of choking fog and squalid pitfalls, amid plot and counterplot, cold self-interest and passion overwrought, and can never refuse attention to the magician who shows it all." Despite his fine critical insight, however, it is as the creator of the endearing *Henry Ryecroft* that we prefer to think of Gissing, perhaps because he himself wishes to be judged in the light of the book which was written "for his own satisfaction" and is "the best he had it in him to do."

William Dean Howells (1837–1920)

Howells seems to have looked meditatively at a world that left no trace of its intensities upon him, though he listened to what the world had to say to him and thought about it, and then, in genial, humorous fashion and in the most perfect manner, wrote his interpretation of it. Howells had but one strong enthusiasm, and that was art. He labored for his style, yet he writes so naturally that no effort is apparent. Mark Twain said of him, "In the sustained exhibition of certain great qualities —clearness, comprehension, verbal exactness, and unforced and seemingly unconscious felicity of phrasing— he is, in my belief, without his peer in the English-writing world."

The next best thing to saying a great thing is the saying of an ordinary thing in a great way, and this was Howells's achievement. Perhaps the reason why he could not achieve the greatest thoughts is that he was too limited by his provincial training to get a comprehensive, understanding view of life. Holding aloof from life, he adventured only in thought. "The profound dread and agony of life," writes H. L. Mencken, "the surge of passion and aspiration, the grand crash and glitter of things, the tragedy that runs eternally under the surface—all this the critic of the future will seek in vain in Dr. Howells' elegant and shallow volumes." Howells indeed did not come down from the gallery to jostle with the crowd; "life is a stage" was literally true for him. His Puritanical reticence was not that of a man who has seen or entered into the vulgar, the in-

decent, or the immoral, and, being shocked and degraded thereby, prefers not to mention the experience; rather, it was the not having anything to be reticent about that results from ignorance of the darker side of life. In speaking of the actors of villainous characters he says, "I never find much nature in them, perhaps because there is not much nature in villainy itself; that is, villainy pure and simple." This characteristic of reticence enabled him to portray truthfully, almost splendidly, the cultured, shielded woman of New England, the woman in the story of *The Rise of Silas Lapham*. It is a remarkable thing in this day, when reticence has been so decidedly repealed, to find a man who lived for eighty-three years without knowing of its repeal. It is still more remarkable because Howells was sought after by the world and was in his day considered the leading man of letters. The war made him somewhat bitter, and his postwar writings have in them some preachment against the evil of money-getting and spending on the enormous American scale. Though there is this touch of bitterness in them and though their scope of vision is still narrow, his writings after the war are his best.

We cannot understand the writings of William Dean Howells unless we understand their author. An atmosphere of delicate, feminine refinement pervaded his life. He judged people and things by the standard of refinement; war was horrible to him because it is foul, brutal, and inelegant. Romance, he thought, gives too much license to the imagination, and unbridled imagination is likely to picture the vulgar and the unrefined.

Why not, we ask, the exquisite and decent as well? Howells was therefore utterly incapable of understanding the realist Dickens, who portrayed too vividly the sordid and common. In *My Mark Twain*, which gives a remarkable insight into Howells's personality, he shows sublime condescension toward the old New England tradition, makes an altogether feminine appraisal of his friend, and evidences his inability to foresee a time beyond his own present. There is never a menace to morals, never an attack on the family or on religion in any work of this clean-hearted, magnanimous man. What a recommendation today! He was like Thackeray in his attitude of benevolent grandfather who has lived peacefully and who, at the close of an uneventful and passionless life, looks kindly at the world that has made him happy. He was indeed benevolent grandfather to many young writers. Delighted when one of his books was a best seller, he yet never consciously sold his art. "It makes one sick and sorry often," he writes, "to see how cheaply the applause of the common people is won. . . . Of course, the means of reaching the widest range of humanity are the simple and the elementary, but there is no telling when the complex and the recondite may not universally please. The art is to make them plain to every one, for every one has them in him."

Howells was a good and happy man—trite adjectives, yet to be used sparingly in their application to present-day writers, if one may judge by the products now being put forth in such abundance. Truly the passing of the exemplary old man and artist who held his

art in such esteem ought to give us pause in these days when art is commercialized, when reticence is laughed to scorn, when H. L. Mencken, with his bowery rendition of Nietzsche, is hailed by the London *New Witness* as "the one American critic," when bitter wit is leveled against all the old ideals for which the venerable Howells stood.

Hilaire Belloc (1870–)

Belloc was born in Versailles and attended the Oratory School at Birmingham, England. After serving his time in the French army he went to Oxford. While yet a student he married a California lady, and the two of them remained at the university in the hope that he might obtain a scholarship. Being disappointed in this expectation, Belloc went to London to become a journalist. Failing at this time in his chosen career, he tried the experiment of a farmhouse in Sussex. In 1902 he became a naturalized citizen of England and was elected to Parliament as a member for South Salford in 1906. Being too zealous for certain reforms, he was abandoned by the official machine, but at the next election was returned by his constituency in South Salford. Having refused to be a candidate for a third term, he began to attack the abuses in the House through the *Eye Witness*, which later became the *New Witness*, the political organ of the "Chesterbelloc." His literary activity during these busy years is a thing with which to conjure. Since the publication of his first successful production, *Bad Child's Book of Beasts*, Belloc has

become well known to historians, to politicians, to economists, and to the literary public.

Belloc is almost the exact opposite to his friend Gilbert Chesterton. Secure in his lifelong Catholicism, he ignores or ridicules all those modern religious vagaries in which Chesterton has sympathetic interest. While Chesterton walks with the rainbow cloud of mysticism about his head and argues with doubters that somewhere the sun is shining, Belloc looks in the face of the sun and assumes that the fact of its shining needs no proof. For those who are blind to its light he has only stern dogma or pity. Belloc is, above all, thoroughly French in his logic and in his irony. So intent is he at times on making a point that he reiterates and elaborates in a monotonous fashion which is painfully dull—a fault of earnestness excusable in one who has written so prolifically and so well.

Belloc's prose moves in a slow, solemn, panoramic, and processional manner. "In the despair of the philosophers there will arise on either side of a great battle the enthusiasms which, from whenceever they blow, are the fresh winds of the soul. Here are coming the heroes and the epic songs for which humanity was sick, and the scenes of one generation of men shall give us in Europe our creeds for centuries. You shall hear the *Chant du Départ* like a great hymn in the army of the *Sambre et Meuse*, and the cheers of men going down on the *Vengeur*. . . . There are the three colors standing against the trees in the North and the South; and the delicate womanly face of Nelson is looking over the bulwarks of the *Victory*, with the slow white

clouds and the light wind of an October day above him, and before him the enemy's sails in the sunlight and the black rocks of the coast." Belloc's soul is that of the artist who takes in vigor from a lovely scene "as a man takes in food and wine." His account of a night in the woods in *The Path to Rome* reminds us of Stevenson—and what greater compliment could we pay his style? "The faint, uncertain glimmer that seemed not so much to shine through the air as to be part of it, took all colour out of the woods and fields and the high slopes above me, leaving them planes of grey and deeper grey. The woods near me were a silhouette, black and motionless, emphasizing the east beyond. The river was white and dead, . . . out of the further pastures a gentle mist had lifted up and lay all even along the flanks of the hills, so that they rose out of it, indistinct at their bases, clear-cut above against the brightening sky." Belloc's soul is that of the poet who can voice those vague but poignant stirrings in our human hearts, stirrings that lie too deep for our own faltering tongues. "In very early youth the soul can still remember its immortal habitation, and clouds and the edges of hills are of another kind from ours, and every scent and colour has a savour of Paradise. What that quality may be no language can tell, nor have men made any words, no, nor any music, to recall it—only in a transient way and elusive the recollection of what youth was, and purity, flashes on us in phrases of the poets, and is gone before we can fix it in our minds—oh! my friends, if we could but recall it! Whatever those sounds may be that are beyond our sounds, and whatever are those

keen lives which remain alive there under memory—whatever is Youth—Youth came up that valley at evening, borne upon a southern air. If we deserve or attain beatitude, such things shall at last be our settled state; and their sudden influence upon the soul in short ecstasies is the proof that they stand outside time, and are not subject to decay." Here is something which savors of Wordsworth's "trailing clouds of glory do we come" and which puts its reader into the same pensive mood—but how much more restful is the certainty of simple faith which lingers through the lines of prose and bids us rejoice that we can rise to those high instincts before which Wordsworth thinks our mortal nature should "tremble like a guilty thing surprised."

Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874–)

Chesterton was reared in Kensington; and the fairies that preside over the births of literary people, after they had furnished him with an artistic father and a mother who has been described as the cleverest woman in London, gave him their diminutive silver spoon for luck. The young Gilbert was educated at St. Paul's School and at the Slade School of Art, where he met his future wife. Not being satisfied with the artistic career which he had adopted, he turned to journalism and became an incurable devotee at the shrine of the press. Ever since he joined forces with Belloc in a debate against Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells, there has been a tendency among critics to link these two in a complementary union designated by the title "Chester-

belloc." This title means, to many of their friends, the union between romanticism and practicality, between mysticism and rationalism, between virginal wonderment and tried experience.

Chesterton is a glorious example of what we are proudly pleased to call the modern essayist, the writer who "takes all knowledge for his province," who is philosopher, critic, politician, friend, enemy, social lion, and good fellow, all in one. He has a way of bringing an easy but undiscovered fact to light, one of those facts as simple as Columbus's egg on end. In *What's Wrong with the World*, after arguing that domesticity is not dull and narrowing, that women have been amateurs in a hundred arts because men were forced to become specialists in a particular trade, he concludes, "Women were not kept at home in order to keep them narrow; on the contrary, they were kept at home in order to keep them broad."

Though Chesterton has a fondness for polysyllables, and though the word "mystic" appears in front of every noun over which he wishes to throw the glamour of romance, he heartily despises the modern euphuist. "I welcome a return to the rudeness of old times; when Luther attacked Henry VIII for being fat; and when Milton and his Dutch opponent devoted pages of their controversy to the discussion of which of them was the uglier. . . . The new controversialists . . . call a man a physical degenerate, instead of calling him an ugly fellow. They say that red hair is the mark of the Celtic stock instead of calling him 'Carrots.'" Perhaps this quotation may serve also to illustrate Chesterton's de-

liberate efforts to be funny, efforts which are so successful that many of his critics and friends, not perceiving the real earnestness that underlies his most ridiculous fooling, consider him to be of frivolous mind. Inevitably Chesterton's enormous literary output cannot but have some chaff among the wheat. He devotes paragraphs, even pages, to pursuit of a practical joke, a clever hoax, which nobody a few years from now will comprehend. Who, for example, even today attaches much importance to the name of Mr. McCabe? Who gets a feeble mental stirring at the name of Mr. Salt? Moreover, though it is a real achievement to have one's name so linked with a literary trick of style that either trick or name will suggest the other, the Chesterton paradox is now almost as much a literary byword as "lily-maid" and "golden hours." The puzzling thing about it is that though it comes perilously near to being a mere mannerism, it still remains a manner of style and does not grow wearisome.

To comprehend Chesterton as a critical writer and to compile for a mental reckoning his many illuminating critical judgments, one must read practically all that he has written. Being mindful of Bacon's saying "Distilled books are like common distilled waters, flashy things," and fearing not only an effect of flatness but also possible misunderstanding of him, we shall content ourselves with a few characteristic passages. "Most people either say that they agree with Bernard Shaw or that they do not understand him. I am the only person who understands him, and I do not agree with him." Chesterton's comments on the style of Stevenson are

pertinent to our study of the literary qualities of the essay. "If the rather vague Victorian public did not appreciate the deep and even tragic ethics with which Stevenson was concerned, still less were they of a sort to appreciate the French finish and fastidiousness of his style; in which he seemed to pick the right word up on the point of his pen, like a man playing spillikins. But that style also had a quality that could be felt; it had a military edge to it, an *acies*; and there was a kind of swordsmanship about it." Perhaps he sees this quality of swordsmanship in Stevenson the more readily because he is himself inspired by real Celtic love of single-hand conflict. In his essay "On Smart Novelists and the Smart Set"—which, by the way, may be interestingly compared with Bacon's advice "On Reading"—he begins in true paradoxical style: "In one sense, at any rate, it is more valuable to read bad literature than good literature." Now any normal teacher's heart will miss a beat over such an introductory sentence, and any normal student who is thus introduced to Chesterton will accept him with a certain smug satisfaction in having found a fellow rebel against pedagogical literary prohibitions. There is no doubt that this redoubtable Englishman has mastered the art of beginnings, for every one of his essays offers a challenge the moment it strides into the presence of the reader, and immediately the mental fray is on—a duel that ends in a complete victory for Chesterton, a hearty slap on the reader's back, a jovial handshake, and an established friendship. This is indeed the familiar essayist at his best.

The story of Chesterton's spiritual life is in his writings. In *The Wild Knight* he is the boy revolting against conventions; in *The Defendant*, his first book of essays, he shows himself as the defender of tradition; in *Orthodoxy* he is an able apologetic writer for Catholicism; and now that the inevitable has happened, he is telling the world in the magazine series "Where All Roads Lead" just why he entered the Catholic Church. We said that fairies presided over his birth; they have done more for him, in throwing over his pathway a glamour of romance. Else why did he see in America an enchanted forest of small frame houses, in the starry splendor of the "Great White Way" a glory of symbols for the illiterate to worship and hail as American ideals that are worth dying for?—granting the heartbroken though ludicrous disappointment when the same illiterate immigrant, unfortunately taught to read, will discover that the gorgeous sign which he supposed to say "Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood" really says "Fifty-seven Varieties." Chesterton is ever expecting a journey into elfland. His fancies have led him into realms where he may scatter dew from a rose-bordered road as he hastes along on the mighty steed of his imagination. They made it easy for him to step across the border that separates the mysteries of mythology invented by man from the mysteries of religion which are true with God. For this huge man has the believing heart of a child, the virginal wonderment of childhood that embraces even the clockwork universe which exists only by the continuous exercise of the Divine will. Having written this we were gratified to learn that

Chesterton gives as an important reason for entering the Church that she is everlastingly *young*, young as the little children like whom we are to become if we wish to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. "Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say 'Do it again'; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, 'Do it again,' to the sun; and every evening, 'Do it again,' to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we."

And Others

There is something as bafflingly mysterious and alluring as the cloud wreaths that twine themselves about distant mountains in the vague utterance of fame concerning certain of her favorites. With this poetic simile we hope to win the forbearance of the pleasing writers whom we are consigning to that most frequently mentioned of all illustrious groups, the "and others." In every book discussing literature, music, history, or science, in every newspaper account of wedding, funeral, prize fight, or divorce scandal, the "and others"

are given prominence, no matter how many illustrious or notorious individuals may fail to receive mention. We have always felt that one of the great joys of the hereafter will be our satisfied curiosity concerning these fascinating persons who veiled themselves under this bewildering pseudonym. Gentle reader, we admit the truth: we have just been indulging in the essays of Edward Verrall Lucas, whose happy faculty of discovering rare and long-since-discarded little oddities to use as matter for charming monologues carries us back to Lamb and provokes us to quibbling a bit. We feel that he can appreciate our tender reluctance to swell the lists of the unspecified "and others," for his is the not altogether unmitigated privilege of being a publisher's reader. Aside from the hours he spends in passing judgment on the child of some laboring author's brain, he indulges in the pastime of writing essays. *Old Lamps for New, Adventures and Enthusiasms, A Wanderer in London,* and *Giving and Receiving* are some of the books from his facile pen. His genial humor entrances the reader as the two of them journey through many worlds and meet queer and entertaining people whose oddities were never before portrayed so winningly. His understanding sympathy embraces even the animal world, and there is something inherently noble in the indignation against the stupid brutality of the bullfight in the essay "Whenever I see a Grey Horse."

So uniform is the excellence of Lucas's writing that selection of quotation from him must be for subjective reasons. For love of Lamb, then: "Before *Elia,* no one writing for print had assumed that his own impressions

of life, grave and gay, were a sufficient or even a suitable subject. Such self-analytical authors as there had been had selected and garnished according to the canons of taste of their time. Lamb came naturally to his task and fondled and exhibited his ego with all the ecstasy of a collector displaying bric-à-brac or first editions; and ever since then, acting upon his sanction, others have been doing it. . . . I should say that his principal service to other writers lay in giving them, by his example, encouragement to be natural, to mix their comic fancies with their serious thoughts—as they are mixed in real life. The mingled thread, he showed, should never be divided."

Among all the moderns who "ecstatically exhibit the ego" none does so more entertainingly than Vernon Lee, or (becoming familiar with the familiar essayist) Violet Paget,—as her family knows her. This essayist and novelist, true disciple of that "subdued, twilight-loving acolyte of beauty," Walter Pater, has journeyed much and has lived long and intensively in Italy. Besides studies in æsthetics and sociology, and several novels, she has written interpretative essays on the Renaissance and on many subjects less profound but no less worth the reading. Suggestive and stimulating, with fantasies exquisitely colored as is a butterfly's wing interspersed through them, her essays furnish a real intellectual banquet. Many of the essays begin with a paradox which is like the crack of a whip to the shambling steeds of a drowsy imagination. "The chief point to be made in this matter is: that books, to fulfill their purpose, do not always require to be read" is surely a sentence to

make the reader "sit up and take notice." And what a conclusion is this to some reasoning about "unheard music": "I am not, therefore, in favour of absolute silence in the art of sounds."

Vernon Lee frequently puts old wine into new bottles, as in the essay "New Friends and Old," wherein she writes: "For every creature we do really love seems to reveal a whole side of life, by the absorbing of our attention into that creature's ways; nay, more, the fact that what we call *loving* is in most cases a complete creation, at least a thorough interpretation of them by our fancy and our shaken-up, refreshed feelings." Interpretation and appreciation are close akin, and the secret of appreciation is continuous courtship. "Courtship might be our attitude towards everything which is capable of giving pleasure; and would not many more things give us pleasure—let us say, the sun in the heavens, the water on the stones, even the fire in the grate, if, instead of thinking of them as existing merely to make our life bearable, we called them, like the saint of Assisi, My Lord the Sun, and Sister Water, and Brother Fire, and thought of them with joy and gratitude?" Unquestionably Vernon Lee is true to Pater in the joy and gratitude with which she accepts beauty.

In extolling the glory of practicing and permitting reticence Vernon Lee must truly voice the sentiments of Pater, shy, retiring lover of beauty. "And one of the unnoticed, because continuous, tragedies of existence is surely such wanton or deliberate destruction of the individual qualities of the soul, such sacrifice of the necessary breathing and standing place which even the

smallest requires; such grudging of the needful solitude and separateness, alas! often to those that we love the best." Anyone who lives amid a harassing round of duties and in close contact with all kinds of persons will find consolation in this feminine and therefore intuitive though perhaps not very reasonable picture of another life. "In the Kingdom of Heaven every one will have a separate room for rest and meditation; a cell perhaps, whitewashed, with a green shutter and a white dimity curtain in the sunshine. And the cells will, of course, be very much alike in all essentials, because most people agree about having some sort of bed, table, chair, and so forth. But some glorified souls will have the flowers (which Dante saw her plucking) of Leah; and others the looking-glass of the contemplative Rachel; and there will be ever so many other little differences, making it amusing and edifying to pay a call upon one's brother or sister soul." It seems that even such a dear and absurd little fantasy should inspire one to be good. Vernon Lee is very human, and herein lies her charm. She sees beneath art the essential humanity that produces the artist. Are not men and women and the "fleeting, forgotten passion of obscure, unromantic mankind"—are not these "the strings, albeit often rusty and jangling, without which Genius, with howsoever a sweeping hand, cannot bring forth its music"? Is there not something in this that recalls Pater's definition of great art as that which "has something of humanity in it, and finds . . . its place in the great structure of human life"? Pater's influence is apparent also in the occasional bits of philosophy which though not didactic

in nature give the needed weight of profounder thought to the scintillating and exquisite fabric of her writing. She is, however, at her best as the familiar and not too philosophical essayist; and her best is difficult to surpass, for she understands so well the essay, "which is nothing if it is not pleasing."

Indulging the philosophical bent seems to be the good pleasure of many modern essayists, and of none is this more true than of Paul Elmer More. His devotion to the study of oriental languages has given to his philosophy a tincture of transcendentalism, the while it has broadened his critical outlook. One who cares little for transcendentalism and less for Emerson, the philosophical grandfather of Mrs. Eddy and her Christian Science, will not appreciate More's essay on the famous New Englander, wherein he is proclaimed "the sweet spirit . . . whom I reverence this side idolatry." Again, one who holds that the reason why theologians in the past frequently opposed scientists was their fear lest scientific observations should endanger their treasure of faith, based on revealed truth concerning God and man's relation to God, will resent More's explanation of the reason for this opposition. Their motive, he says, in the essay on Lafcadio Hearn, was fear of possible revelation by science of the fact of preëxistence, whether through transmigration as accepted by the Orient or creative evolution as promulgated in the Occident. "It seems to me that the foreboding of this dreaded disclosure may account for many things in the obscure history of the race. By reason of this terror the savage trembled before the magician who seemed

to have penetrated the mysteries of nature about him. . . . But more particularly in the Christian world this formless terror has taken to itself a body and a name. . . . If we examine this bitter warfare between science and revelation, we shall find the Church actuated throughout by one ever-present, obscure dread, and when the source of this dread is made clear to us we shall be slow to condemn her conduct. We shall at least have sympathy with her in the struggle, for if she has been a persecutor, she has also been the champion of a losing cause." Now, since the fact is established that religion and science may walk hand in hand into the innermost recesses of nature, the Church seems rather to be the champion of a winning cause; she has, in fact, made science her handmaid. This, despite certain contemporary scientists. As for us, whenever we look at a gibbering ape we recall ecstatically the verse "Let us make man to our image and likeness: and let him have dominion," and then rejoice anew in our spirituality, reason, and free will.

But it is best to leave this purely material evolution and confine ourselves to the "soul evolution" explained by Hearn and elaborated by More. The union of Western evolution with Eastern transmigration produced a philosophy of inherited emotions and thoughts. Nightmares are not the combined product of indigestion and subconscious memory of some actual experience of terror; they are caused by "some point of dream-contact with the total race-experience of shadowy seizure . . . a shuddering of memory, measureless even by millions of years." This is of course comforting to the lover of

Welsh rabbit. Yet who would like to think that his mother's tenderness is not her own, but is "the inherited love of numberless millions of dead mothers," or that his own reaction to music is not so much due to his cultivated taste as to "some eddying immeasurable of ancient pleasure and pain."

More is consistent in his criticism, which is "not so much directed at the individual thing as to its relation with other things, and to its place as cause or effect in a whole group of tendencies." More enters into the psychology of criticism, the success or failure of which depends, he says, on will. "Any one who looks deeply into his own heart must recognize there two distinct principles governing his life,—the will to act, and,—let us not say the will to renounce, for fear of misinterpretation,—but rather the *will to refrain*; and on the right understanding of these two faculties depends largely our insight into much that is best and much that is worst in literature." He then analyzes virility, decadence, and mysticism in terms of the predominance of one of these wills, a procedure which lends novelty and vigor to his criticism. A man of prestige, More can but exercise influence on the trend of American criticism. It is pleasant, then, to read in his preface to *Aristocracy and Justice*, "Peace and loveliness have not left the world; nor has honourable endeavour disappeared from among men, nor the obstinate hope of better things." One of the finest things in this book is in the essay "The Paradox of Oxford," wherein More laments the passing of the secular tradition of the classics, sources of "inexhaustible joy and consolation," and the modern substitu-

tion of humanitarianism for "obedience to the will of God." "Humanitarianism, however it may be concerned with human destinies and however it may call upon our emotions, leaves out of account the deep thirst of the soul for the infinite wells of peace; it has forgotten. . . . 'For thou hast made us for thyself, and our heart cannot be quieted until it resteth in thee.'" The earnest thinker blessed with the virtue of humility can but see the inadequacy of things human to satisfy the human heart.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

In this chapter only a few of the many who deserve consideration have been selected. Space is lacking to mention the work of Max Beerbohm, Arnold Bennett, A. C. Benson, Augustine Birrell, Samuel McChord Crothers, John Galsworthy, Edmund Gosse, R. C. Holliday, Andrew Lang, Richard Le Gallienne, Hamilton Wright Mabie, George Moore, A. A. Milne, Christopher Morley, Leslie Stephen, G. E. Woodberry, H. G. Wells, George Fitch, Burges Johnson, and William Butler Yeats. One of the finest anthologies of essays is that of William M. Tanner, under the title *Essays and Essay-Writing*, which is a collection of essays published anonymously in the "Contributors' Club" of the *Atlantic Monthly*. Within its pages the familiar essay is to be seen at its best. The introduction to the book is illuminating in that it defines and classifies ably the various kinds of familiar essays. Another anthology of note is that of Benjamin Heydrick under the title *Types of the Essay*. The anthology *Modern Essays*, by Christopher Morley, with its well-discriminated selection among essayists, its prefatory essay, and its biographical notes is a real treasure to the lover of the contemporary essay. To the essayists named in the fore-

going list he adds, and justly, such writers as John Macy, William Allen White, Rupert Brooke, Don Marquis, David W. Bone, William McFee, Joyce Kilmer, Joseph Conrad, A. P. Herbert, O. W. Firkins, William Osler, Harry Morgan Ayers, Thomas Burke, H. M. Tomlinson, Louise Imogen Guiney, Stewart Edward White, Marian Storm, George Santayana, Simeon Strunsky, Bertrand Russell, Philip Guedalla, Robert P. Utter, Logan P. Smith, James Branch Cabell, Harry Esty Dounce, and Heywood Broun. We can but conclude this chapter with some words from Morley's preface, which express the difficulty of selecting from material so abundant: "Indeed the pangs of the anthologist, if he has conscience, are burdensome. . . . It would be enjoyable (for me, at any rate) to write an essay on the things I have lingered over with intent to include them in this little book, but have finally sacrificed for one reason or another."

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

There's rosemary, that's for remembrance.—OPHELIA

When you have spent a long spring day in the woods, where your every sense has been intoxicated by the riotous glory of the young life about you, and where your soul has learned the peace that abides in the shadow of strong old trees; and when at evening, your arms laden by a profusion of fragile wild flowers and your heart tremulous with the stir of newborn hopes a-wing, you come back to the workaday world, what is there to say? And if, as in the fairy, inconsistent changefulness of dreams, the woods be but a symbol of the cool and mystic depths, of the sun-flecked glades, of the life-giving streams in the realm of literature, and the fragile wild flowers be the blossoms of thought that have had their roots in the hearts of men, then, indeed, what is there to say? Perhaps it were best, now that we have come back from this realm into the garish world, simply to scatter, in their beauty, our blossoms upon the floor of the storehouse of memory and there let them live if they can. Or perhaps we should study them first that we may discover all their beauties, and that by some kindly fate one or two at least of them may take root again in our hearts. In this busy world

of ours the tragedy of books which are forgotten, of books which are never read, is so little recked of. Poets have hymned the pathos of the violet hid beneath a mossy stone, of the desert rose that wastes its beauty unseen by human eye, of the unset gem that shall never lie on the breast of a woman, of the bird which from the top of a tree spills its song upon lonely places, but who shall express the tragedy of a soul's message to an unheeding world, the tragedy of the essay that has no reader? In this heart-hungry world of ours should there not be one lover for every essay?

And what is this essay that is seeking a lover? It is a seashell from the sands of time which shall forever murmur a secret hidden in the ocean of life; it is a beacon light to guide our faltering feet adown the dark and mysterious pathways of the past; it is an urn fragrant with the sweets of all dead summers; it is a voice through which the myriad inaudible whisperings of nature find speech; it is a song of love for man which shall outlive a thousand lovers; it is as the angel Israfel, whose heartstrings were a lute whereon who would might play; it is, being literary art, the one earthly immortality, the one abiding-place which the soul may keep when it has abandoned all things else for Paradise. Love of the beautiful in nature, in man, and in God is the secret of all art; above all, it is the secret of literary art, which is beauty-loving, unchanging humanity's one speech in common. Art is the child that is born of man's love for the beautiful, immortal child of a mortal father, child born in secret because the beautiful ever yields herself with reluctance to a mere creature of

time. Art is as immortal as time. Love is the secret of the immortality of art, because the artist so loves his fellow men that he gives to them in their need this child of his desire and because he is so beloved by his fellow men that his gift to them is treasured till time will end. Art should be all-joyous, for beauty is joy, but sometimes there is in it a wistfulness because it is not only the child of eternal beauty but is the child of mortality and must die with time; it is wistful because the "forever" of time is but as a moment of the eternity wherein beauty dwells. This wistfulness of art is, however, but as the rainbow in the twilight of a sorrow-darkened heart, as the loveliness of the world seen through a veil of tears, for the beauty is still there, joy still lives, loveliness abides if there is but patience to await its unveiling.

We who look at nature so much, who talk of her so often and so glibly, but who so seldom live with her and know her, are even more culpably ignorant when it comes to our fellow men. Nature is so prodigal of her gifts; human genius is so miserly. Night scatters a million stars over the heavens; flowers carpet the world; but genius gives herself most rarely. If we gaze unmoved into the starlit sky, if we trample blossoms beneath our feet, we may be forgiven; but if we scorn the rare gift of genius, what, then, do we deserve? Happily, however, all of us have moments when we do appreciate lovingly the gifts of nature and the fruits of genius, when we are moved by emulation to desire that we too may make the world lovelier by giving it something of the beauty that is in the humblest of us all.

Few of us can be musicians, sculptors, painters, or poets, but all of us may become in some measure artists in prose. Shall we be afraid to try? Are the stars, as stars, less perfect because there is a moon in the sky; is the daisy less dear in its common homeliness because a rose blooms close by? No; every star, every flower, every soul, has its own peculiar beauty, and if it dies without becoming dear to someone, the world loses something which can never be regained.

How often in this sad old world do we find beauty made more poignantly exquisite by contrast with something ugly and misshapen. Thus, in the woods there are gnarled, dead trees which kindly vines try in vain to redeem from their unsightliness, and fetid, unhealthy swamps which the life-giving breath of young summer touches in mercy only to draw from their murky depths exotic flowers whose weird beauty hides their poisonous hearts—and from these we turn in pity and disgust to find ourselves lost in a maze of violet-carpeted pathways. So in our study of the essay we have found the unliterary, the misshapen, even the unhealthy and dangerous distilling its poison through flowerlike beauties of language. We have paused to marvel at the rugged grandeur of a Carlyle as we would wonder at a gnarled, unshapely old tree; we have paused in reverence at the age-old wisdom of a Bacon as we would venerate an oak sacred in its stately magnificence; we have braved the passionate upbraidings of a Milton as we would face the snarl of a belated March wind; we have even waded through the swamps which are the writings of Swift, and have marveled in fearing pity at

the strangely beautiful yet poisonous flowers which the breath of living genius caused to grow in the awful depths of his sick mind,—and all these we have taken for granted as necessary parts of the harmonious whole. And if, after a long spring day in the woods, we can forget its little leaven of ugliness,—true leaven because our Father knows us too well as creatures of sense to give us perfect beauty in this world; if we can bring away with us only peace of soul, hope of heart, and love of its flower-sweetness, can we not, after our study of the essay, remember and love only its heart-searching beauty in its most ideal forms? Mayhap we can do more. Mayhap we can treasure even the less perfect essay as the legacy of one who, loving his fellow men, could intrust to them no greater inheritance than the outpourings of his soul.

With something of the guilty feeling we should experience in having been so stupidly unkind as to compel a wood nymph to come indoors to labor, we shall consider the literary essay as a means to master the art of prose writing. The essay is a true little Jack-of-all-trades in the house of literature—not the proverbial Jack, however, for it is a genius no matter to what it puts its hand. In description one would look far to find anything finer than "The South-Sea House" in *Essays of Elia*, or "A Night among the Pines" in *Travels with a Donkey*; in narration unrestrained by the confines of plot and ambling gracefully along under its burden of lyric descriptions and reflections, one could find nothing more fanciful and alluring than this same *Travels with a Donkey*, *The Path to Rome* of Belloc, the *South*

Sea Idylls of Charles Warren Stoddard, or the inimitable short-story essays themselves; in exposition, one can learn the true meaning of the abandonment of grief, of "twilight always in the heart," in the *De Profundis* of Oscar Wilde, while as to love of life and reasons for loving it, one would seek in vain anything more satisfying and exquisite than Lamb's "Valentine's Day" and "Old China," than Thompson's exposition of the lovely things that go into the making of a poet, than Montaigne's explanation of his states of mind, or the stately old Bacon's expository views of the business of living; and even in argumentation one may discover the literary essay at home in the pages of Milton, of Burke, and of Newman, while the gentle art of persuasion is the native gift of Chesterton and Repplier.

Though we advance without hesitation the claims of the essay to first place among prose forms of literature, we are somewhat diffident in comparing it to poetry, which starts with the real advantages of rime and meter. But the familiar essay at least shares with lyric poetry the glory of its subject matter, the writer's self. The lyric loveliness of Lamb and of Stevenson, the musical cadences and broken melodies, more soul stirring perhaps than sustained song, that play through their lines as winds sweep or rustle through the quivering reeds, have all the power of poetry to touch our hearts by emotion. We wonder, for example, if Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* really rises to the heights of Thompson's prose describing it: "It is unquestionably the greatest and most prodigal exhibition of Shelley's powers, this amazing lyric world, where immortal clari-

ties sigh past in the perfumes of the blossoms, populate the breathings of the breeze, throng and twinkle in the leaves that twirl upon the bough; where the very grass is all a-rustle with lovely spirit-things, and a weeping mist of music fills the air." Again, Shelley "plays truant from earth, slips through the wicket of fancy into heaven's meadow, and goes gathering stars." Finally, was ever sorrow hymned in more exquisite music than this! "Such a poet, it may be, mists with sighs the window of his life until the tears run down it; then some air of searching poetry, like an air of searching frost, turns it to a crystal wonder. The god of golden song is the god, too, of the golden sun; so peradventure song-light is like sunlight, and darkens the countenance of the soul. Perhaps the rays are to the stars what thorns are to the flowers; and so the poet, after wandering over heaven, returns with bleeding feet." Sometimes, all unconsciously, a critic shows himself a greater man and, in consequence, a greater poet than the author whose work he is criticizing.

Linked to the name of Thompson is that of Alice Meynell, whose poetry is of rare spiritual quality and of a haunting melodiousness like the faint chime of far-away bells. Her prose is more human and therefore of wider appeal, an appeal especially evident in her recent collection of essays, *The Second Person Singular*. Mrs. Meynell, as is pointed out in Chesterton's essay in the *Dublin Review* for March, 1923, combines masculine virility of thought with feminine nicety of expression in a way which makes her unique among women writers. One of her most exquisite productions, which displays

the adaptable spirit of her poetic muse, is a little prose fantasy called "The Tethered Constellations," wherein the thistledown is transformed into a star. "There is a little kind of star that drowns itself by hundreds in the river Thames—the many-rayed silver-white seed that makes journeys on all the winds up and down England and across it in the end of summer. It is a most expert traveller, turning a little wheel a-tiptoe wherever the wind lets it rest, and speeding on those pretty points when it is not flying. . . . All unlike is this pilgrim star to the tethered constellations. It is far adrift. It goes singly to all the winds." Her fine essay "Anima Pellegrina," beginning, "Every language in the world has its own phrase, fresh for the stranger's fresh and alien sense of its signal significance; a phrase that is its own essential possession, and yet is dearer to the speaker of other tongues," is pertinent to the question of idiomatic writing. How happy are we who love our beautiful native language in knowing that our writers of the past half-century have been able to throw off the shackles of Greek and Latin bondage, to lift their voices above the flood of foreign speech that sweeps constantly into our harbors and across our country; how happy are we in reading the prose of inspired writers, prose made vital and forceful, songful and sweet by the dear, homely idioms which have struck their roots deep in our spoken language and deeper, perhaps, in our hearts.

The most loquacious person in the world is the lover, and in trying to say farewell to the subject of the essay we experience something of the lover's difficulty when told that he must now be silent about the charms of his

beloved. Mayhap, like the lover, we have been at times extravagant in our praise; perhaps we have, in the excess of affection, "looked the thing into loveliness"; perhaps we have been blind to faults or, seeing them, have rather glossed them over; unashamed, we admit everything. If these chapters induce, perchance, one reader to read and learn to love one essay, then we shall not have written in vain, for his life will be sweeter, and because of this the world about him will be more significant and more beautiful. If it does not accomplish even this, our little book will still be glad to travel through desert places and acclaim the praises of that child of sunlight and of shadow, of stern reality and of mystic dreams, of sorrow and of joy, of that lovely, immortal child whose heart is as a rainbow and whose footfall is as silver moonbeams on the sleeping flowers —the literary essay.

READING LIST OF CONTEMPORARY ESSAYS

This list is intended to supplement the reading already indicated in the text itself as necessary to a comprehensive grasp of the essay. It will perhaps serve as a guide to teachers, students, or readers who wish to keep abreast of the times in things literary. Even a cursory glance at the authors named in it will give a hint that the essay has come to stay and demands attention.

ABBOTT, CHARLES C. (1843–1919), naturalist. Days Out of Doors, Freedom of the Fields.

ABBOTT, LYMAN (1835–1922), editor and author. Problems of Life, The Spirit of Democracy.

ALDRICH, THOMAS BAILEY (1836–1907), editor of *Atlantic Monthly*. Ponkapog Papers.

AUERBACH, JOSEPH S., lawyer. Essays and miscellanies.

BAKER, RAY S. ("David Grayson") (1870–), magazine editor. Adventures in Contentment, The Friendly Road.

BARRIE, JAMES M. (1860–), Scottish novelist and playwright. My Lady Nicotine, Margaret Ogilvy.

BEERBOHM, MAX (1872–), English critic. More, Yet Again, And Even Now.

BENNETT, ARNOLD (1867–), English novelist. Literary Taste: How to Form It, Things that have Interested Me.

BENSON, ARTHUR CHRISTOPHER (1862–), English poet and essayist. At Large, The Silent Isle.

BERGENGREN, RALPH (1871–), dramatic critic. The Perfect Gentleman, The Comforts of Home.

BIRRELL, AUGUSTINE (1850–), chancery barrister. Obiter Dicta, In the Name of the Bodleian.

BLACK, HUGH (1868–), professor of practical theology in Union Theological Seminary, New York. Friendship, Work.

Bolles, Frank (1856–1894), naturalist. Land of the Lingering Snow.

Briggs, Le Baron R. (1863–). Dean of Harvard University. School, College, and Character.

Brooke, Rupert (1887–1915), English poet; died in the Ægean. Letters from America.

Broun, Heywood (1888–), newspaper man. Seeing Things at Night.

Bryce, James (1838–1922), diplomat. Hindrances to Good Citizenship.

Butler, Ellis Parker (1869–), author. Ghosts What Ain't.

Cabell, James B. (1879–), novelist. Beyond Life.

Carpenter, Edward (1872–), author. Angels' Wings: Essays on Art and its Relation to Life.

Crothers, Samuel McChord (1857–), clergyman. The Gentle Reader, The Pardoner's Wallet.

Curtis, G. W., editor of *Harper's Magazine*. Prue and I, From the Easy Chair.

Dobson, Austin (1840–), poet. Eighteenth Century Vignettes.

Don Marquis (1878–), newspaper man. The Almost Perfect State.

Dounce, Harry E. (1869–), staff of *New York Evening Post*. Some Nonsense about a Dog.

Dowden, Edward (1843–), professor in Dublin University. Transcripts and Studies, New Studies in Literature.

Eaton, Walter Prichard (1878–), dramatic critic. Green Trails and Upland pastures, Barn Doors and Byways.

Eliot, Charles W. (1834–), educator. The Durable Satisfactions of Life, American Contributions to Civilization.

Foerster, Norman (1887–), professor of English in the University of North Carolina. Nature in American Literature.

Galsworthy, John (1867–), English novelist and dramatist. The Inn of Tranquillity, A Sheaf.

Gerould, Katherine F. (1879–), writer. Modes and Morals.

Gibbs, Sir Philip (1867–), journalist. People of Destiny.

Gosse, Edmund (1849–), critic and poet. Collected essays.

Graham, Stephen (1884–), editor and author. A Tramp's Sketches.

GRIGGS, EDWARD H. (1868–), lecturer and essayist. Self-Culture.

GUINEY, LOUISE IMOGEN (1861–1920), poet and essayist. The Precept of Peace.

HARRISON, FREDERIC (1832–), publicist and critic. Philosophy of Common Sense, Critical Essays.

HEARN, LAFCADIO (1850–1904), journalist. Out of the East, A Japanese Miscellany.

HOLLIDAY, ROBERT C. (1880–), editor and author. Walking-Stick Papers, Peeps at People.

JACKS, LAWRENCE P. (1860–), editor of *Hibbert Journal*. From the Human End, Among the Idol Makers.

JAMES, WILLIAM (1842–1910), professor of philosophy. Talks to Teachers, The Will to Believe.

JEROME, JEROME K. (1859–), journalist and dramatist. Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow.

JOHNSON, BURGES (1877–), publisher; professor in Vassar College; lecturer. As I Was Saying.

KILMER, JOYCE (1886–1918), poet and essayist; died in World War. Circus and Other Essays.

KNICKERBOCKER, E. VAN B. Pipes o' Pan in a City Park.

LARNED, J. N. (1836–1913), author. Books, Culture, and Character.

LYND, ROBERT. Books and Authors.

LYNN, MARGARET, professor in the University of Kansas; contributor to the *Atlantic Monthly*.

MABIE, HAMILTON WRIGHT (1846–1916), editor. My Study Fire, Books and Culture.

MACY, JOHN (1877–), contributor to magazines. The Spirit of American Literature.

MATTHEWS, BRANDER (1862–), professor in Columbia University. Inquiries and Opinions.

MEYNELL, ALICE (1858–1922), poet and essayist. The Second Person Singular, The Rhythm of Life.

MILNE, A. A. (1882–), journalist. Not that it Matters, If I May.

MITCHELL, D. G. (1822–1908), author. Reveries of a Bachelor, Dream Life.

MORLEY, CHRISTOPHER (1890–), editorial staff of the *New York Evening Post*. Pipefuls, Mince Pie.

MORLEY, JOHN LORD (1838–), statesman and critic. Critical biographies.

MURRY, JOHN M. Countries of the Mind.

NEWTON, A. E. (1863–), collector of first editions. The Amenities of Book Collecting.

NICHOLSON, MEREDITH (1866–), author. The Man in the Street, The Valley of Democracy.

NOYES, ALFRED (1880–), poet. The Sea in English Poetry.

OSLER, WILLIAM (1849–1919), physician. An Alhambra Student.

PERRY, BLISS (1860–), professor of English literature in Harvard University. Park Street Papers, Carlyle.

PHELPS, WILLIAM L. (1865–), professor in Yale University; contributor to *Scribner's Magazine*. As I Like It.

ROOSEVELT, THEODORE (1858–1919), statesman. American Ideals, History as Literature.

RUSSELL, BERTRAND (1872–), author. Mysticism and Logic.

SAINTSBURY, GEORGE (1845–), professor of English in the University of Edinburgh. Notes on a Cellar Book.

SANTAYANA, GEORGE (1865–), author. Little Essays.

SEDGWICK, HENRY D. (1861–), author. Essays on Great Writers.

STORM, MARIAN, journalist. Minstrel Weather.

STRUNSKY, SIMEON (1879–), editor of the *New York Evening Post*. Post-Impressions, The Patient Observer.

TOMLINSON, H. M. (1873–), associate editor of London *Nation*. Old Junk.

UTTER, ROBERT P. (1875–), journalist; professor in the University of California. Winter Mists.

WARNER, CHARLES DUDLEY (1829–1900), journalist. As We Go, As We Were Saying.

WELLS, H. G. (1866–), author. Various sociological and philosophical treatises.

WENDELL, BARRETT (1855–1921), professor of English in Harvard University. Stelligeri and Other Essays.

WHITE, WILLIAM A. (1868–), newspaper man. Mary White.

WILSON, WOODROW (1856–), scholar and statesman. Mere Literature, When a Man Comes to Himself.

WINTER, WILLIAM (1836–1917), dramatic critic. Critical essays.

WOODBERRY, GEORGE E. (1855–), poet and critic; professor in Columbia University. The Appreciation of Literature.

YEATS, WILLIAM B. (1865–), Irish poet, dramatist, and critic. Ideas of Good and Evil.

ZANGWILL, ISRAEL (1864–), novelist and playwright. Without Prejudice.

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